

JUN 05 1985

JEEVAHARA



A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND LEFTIST IDEOLOGIES

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
AND ITS FATE IN LEFT-WING HEGELIANISM

Paul Cruysberghs

RELIGION: OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE -
MARXIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

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SOME IMPLICATIONS

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January 1985

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

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JEEVADHARA

The Problem of Man

**THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND
LEFTIST IDEOLOGIES**

Editor

THOMAS VELLILAMTHADAM

Theology Centre
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India

467222

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Editorial

A concern for the exploration of the authentic concept of God restates a perennial problem. Correct representation of God seems to be a step towards correct knowledge about God.

Reports from different parts of the world point to a revival of religious interest among people. At Indira Gandhi's death people — young and old, believers and non-believers — joined in prayer gatherings. There is a return to religion among American intellectuals, "after failing to find adequate answers in such secular alternatives as political activism, science and art" (*Span*, Dec. 1984, pp. 26-32).

There is a feeling of *déjà vu* when one reads about God and leftist forces. Few words occur more frequently in theologico-philosophical debate on leftist ideologies than 'God'. All parties constantly refer to 'God' and to 'religion', though seldom with any sensitivity to or awareness of the nature and history of God. As a result misconceptions abound. On the one hand, many people profess a great respect for God. On the other hand, there are some who have absolute aversion to God and everything divine.

It is a fact that a particular conception of God influences life and activities of man. Thus an impersonal concept of God would pave the way for an impersonal life. In many respects, one imagines God as a superhuman being who 'solves' the problems. The question about God and the question about man are essentially related. In the Christian view, God is revealed not just as a supreme being but as a personal God. But the image of a personal and living God has been blurred in the course of history. Hegelian and Marxian critiques attest to this distorted image.

The solution is not to destroy religion or to return to religionless society. Nor does the solution appear to be a rejection of ideologies which are antagonistic to religion. The question must occur, however, concerning the point at which modern leftist forces and religious forces begin to destroy man. And this is a question which must be taken seriously.

Paul Cruysberghs tries to elucidate the complex relationship between Hegel's philosophy of religion and the atheistic positions of the Left Hegelians. In doing so, he rejects Hegelian atheism as a form of reductionism and pleads for a return to Hegel's original ideas. It should be noted that, in Hegel's thought, representation (*Vorstellung*) is important for the articulation of the religious consciousness.

Antony Kolencherry describes how Marx departs from Hegelian views. He seems rather to affirm that it would be inappropriate to speak of God in Marxism. There is an *a-theism* in Marxism which is materialistic and anthropomorphic humanism, developed under the pattern of left-wing Hegelians and Feuerbach's anthropology.

Thomas Kochuthara deals with a very topical issue: the concept of God in the theology of liberation. The Church has carried out her functions and structured herself according to the traditional pattern derived from the God-concept as an unmoved hierarchical being who remains at the top. Liberation theology on the contrary stresses a God who reveals himself in human actions.

Finally, Thomas Vellilamthadam points out some of the implications of the true idea of God, pleading for the responsibility of the authentic religious principle in actualizing human rights and values.

Thomas Vellilamthadam

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion and its Fate in Left-Wing-Hegelianism

In this article I want to show how Hegel's philosophy of religion found its historical completion in the radically atheistic world views of Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx.

When Hegel died in 1831, his philosophy had become so popular that it gave rise to a real Hegelian Movement in German philosophy. A group of elder Hegel pupils, which consisted a.o. of K. Rosenkranz, Ph. Marheineke, L. van Henning and K. Michelet, formed an Association of the Deceased's Friends, which from 1832 to 1845 procured a first edition of Hegel's collected works.

It was characteristic of these Elder Hegelians — almost all of them held a high academic position — that they offered a rather conservative interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. For that reason they were also called Right Hegelians. Their interpretation was "Right" in a political as well as in a religious sense.

In their political philosophy they pointed out the conservative, and sometimes reactionary aspects of Hegel's philosophy. More than Hegel had done himself they emphasized the rationality of the actual Prussian state and they were opposed to revolution of whatever kind.

In their philosophy of religion Right Hegelians tried to prove Hegel's orthodoxy. Hegel's philosophy of God had to be understood in a theistic sense: Hegel's God was a transcendent personal God, and his system also included man's personal immortality.

This orthodox interpretation of Hegel's philosophy was contested by the so called Young or Left Hegelians, as for example A. Ruge, B. Bauer, M. Stirner, L. Feuerbach and K. Marx. These offered a more daring interpretation of Hegelian philosophy. They found in Hegel's political philosophy at least the germs of revolutionary practice. Rationality has to be carried through in reality and philosophy plays an essential role in this process¹. It has the critical task of separating life morals from dead law in present society in order to create a new situation whereby law and morals would harmonize better than they did before.

Hegel's philosophy of religion they considered thoroughly pantheistic. Some of them even declared that consistent hegelianism necessarily had to lead to atheism.

I will now try to elucidate the complex relationship between Hegel's philosophy of religion and the atheistic positions of the Left Hegelians. First I will deal with Hegel's philosophy of religion quite extensively. Secondly I will treat the philosophy of the representative Left Hegelians B. Bauer, L. Feuerbach and K. Marx. In my conclusion I will reject left hegelian atheism as a form of reductionism and plead for a return to Hegel's original ideas.

I. Hegel's Philosophy: a Philosophical Theology

When Bruno Bauer in his anonymously edited pamphlet *The Trump of Doom* characterizes Hegel as an atheist and an anti-christian, his intention is obviously provocative. Nothing indeed is more self-evident than reckoning Hegel on the contrary to the long series of

1. In the *Foreword* to his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel defended the much discussed thesis that "what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, transl. by T. M. Knox, Oxford, p. 10). Left Hegelians stressed the first part of the thesis; Right Hegelians the second part. N. B. When quoting Hegel I used as much as possible the existing English translations. Sometimes, however, I modified the terminology.

thinkers, who reduced philosophy to metaphysics, and moreover the latter to theology².

Though Hegel in his so called *Early Theological Writings* criticizes orthodox christianity, his intentions clearly are religious.

At first he objects to all kinds of dogmatism and propagates a Kantian religion within the limits of pure reason. In his *Life of Jesus* Hegel is offering us a biography from which all dogmatism is carefully removed. Jesus appears to be nothing more than a moralist, continuously opposing the inner morality to the pure legalism of Jewish religion. The failure of this intention to raise his people to morality was the tragedy of his life.

Very soon, however, Hegel discovers that religion has to be more than what Kant made of it. Religion is a matter of the heart, not only of the reason. After all, Christianity, when reduced to morality is not really different from Judaism. In Jewish religion God appeared to be an exterior legislator and man had to obey blindly. The relation of man to God was one of a slave to his master. Now, if Jesus had been nothing more than a defender of morality, he would only have enforced the master-slave-relationship between God and man. In morality indeed, the relation of submission, which was so typical of Jewish legalism is not really annihilated: it is just internalized. Morality requires obedience to the legislation of practical reason. Thus, man as a sensual being has to submit to himself as a rational being. The necessity of this inner submission reduces man to a being unreconciled with and divided in his inner self. If religion wants to reconcile man to God, it not only has to be a matter of reason, but also of the heart, of sensibility. Therefore in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*

2. K. Barth, for example, and H. Kung after him, have been seriously asking why Hegel has not become the Thomas Aquinas of Protestantism (cf. H. Kung, *Existiert Gott*, Munchen: 1981, p. 181.)

Hegel will no longer consider morality as being the kernel of Jesus' message. Jesus' message is a message of love. The importance of this message appears most clearly when we come upon the problem of sin. For the problem of sin, morals have just one solution: punishment, – not immediately, since that is the task of the system of legality, but in the hereafter, in the world to come. However, since God is a God of love, says Hegel, not punishment but remission of our sins has the final word. Thus Christian religion brings us a message that can reconcile us to life, including its dark and negative sides also. The fate of Christianity, however, has been its relapse into Judaism and legalism.

Therefore, Hegel together with his friends Hölderlin and Schelling dreams of a new religion and a new mythology that can satisfy man's reason as well as his heart and his phantasy. "A higher spirit, sent by heaven, has to found this new religion amongst us; it will be the last greatest work of mankind."³

In the so called *Fragment of a System* (1800) Hegel deals extensively with the relation between religion and philosophy for the first time. He emphasizes the finite character of philosophy, because it sticks irrevocably to unreconciled oppositions, such as the one between thinking and non-thinking, and the one between the subject and the object of thought. Only religion, being the "self-elevation of man from finite life to infinite life" can reconcile all oppositions⁴. For that reason religion has to be considered a sphere beyond philosophy.

Not long after the redaction of the *Fragment of a System*, however, in 1801 Hegel changed his position. In *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System*

3. *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, Werke in Zwanzig Bänden, Vol. I Frühe, p. 236.

4. *Fragment of a System' Early Theological Writings*, transl. by T.M. Knox, Philadelphia, p. 311.

of *Philosophy*, the first work published by Hegel himself, philosophy appears to be superior to religion. In the *Fragment of a System* the particular task of philosophy was to demonstrate the finite character of all reflection. Now its task has come to overcome — by reflection! — all dichotomy that occurs in human life⁵. Hegel seems to have discovered that religion is not any more able to realize its own program of reconciliation. Reflection has become so dominant in modern western culture that religion cannot overcome it any more. When confronted with modern culture the religious message can only refer to the world beyond, which seems to have lost all signification for the actual world that we are living in⁶. The oppositions, posited and hardened by reflexive culture — such as that between reason and faith, the finite and the infinite, mind and body, etc. — can henceforth be dissolved only by reflection itself. Modern culture cannot pass reflection: it no longer accepts any foreign authority beside or above itself.

This point of view will never be abandoned by Hegel any more. A sharp distinction between understanding ("Verstand") and reason ("Vernunft") will allow Hegel to distinguish his speculative philosophy, tending at the absolute supersession of all oppositions, from the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Jacobi, which stick to the finite. It is speculative philosophy, not religion, that will have to solve the problems of modern man in future. While in earlier times philosophy was considered the "ancilla theologiae" it has been emancipated now and appears to be the truth of religion from now on.

The link between philosophy and religion, however, remains: hegelian philosophy indeed has to be considered a natural theology. In 1802, shortly after the publication of

5. *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, transl. by H.S. Harris and W. Cerf, Albany: 1977, p. 89.

6. *Faith and Knowledge*, transl. by W. Cerf and H. S. Harris, Albany: 1977, p. 55 ff.

the *Differenz-Schrift* Hegel defines the task of philosophy in a clear theological sense in an article *How Common Sense Considers Philosophy*: the first interest of philosophy is "to put once again God absolutely at the head of philosophy as the sole ground of everything, as the only *principium essendi et cognoscendi*, after he has been put long enough beside other finite things, or completely at the end as a postulate, which starts from an absolute finitude"⁷.

But also in his later mature works Hegel underlines that God is the real object of philosophy. In the *Introduction* of his *Encyclopaedia* Hegel writes that "the objects of philosophy are upon the whole the same as those of religion. In both the object is Truth, in that supreme sense in which God and God only is the Truth"⁸.

The Right Hegelians have always taken this utterance by Hegel seriously. They have always considered Hegel a philosophical theologian and they were right. Of course, the main question will be whether Hegel's God can be identified with the God of faith. Hegel is as ambitious to offer a philosophy that brings to comprehension what is accepted as an object of faith in religion and, particularly, in Christianity. The question is whether faith can recognize itself in Hegel's philosophy.

It is no coincidence, that B. Bauer writes his *Trump of Doom* from the standpoint of an orthodox christian in order to depict Hegel as an atheist and an anti-christian. For an orthodox believer it is rather hard to recognize himself in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel himself has stressed that some one who remains on the standpoint of faith refusing any endeavour to comprehend what he believes will

7. *Wie der gemeine Menschenverstand die Philosophie nehme* *Gesammelte Werke*, 4, p. 1979.

8. *The Logic of Hegel*, transl from *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* by W. Wallace, 2nd ed., Oxford: 1992 (repr. 1868) p. 3.

never recognize himself in philosophy, whereas, on the contrary, a philosopher can recognize himself in faith⁹. In order to deal with this important question, we will have to examine the specific way in which God appears in religion and in philosophy. Then, it will be clear how a theological thinker like Hegel could be at the origin of modern atheism.

II. Philosophy as the Truth of Religion

According to Hegel, philosophy and religion have the same object: God. Thus the difference between both can only be formal. Philosophy and religion both speak of God, but the way they do so is different. This sounds quite orthodox, especially to Catholic ears: for Thomas Aquinas also the difference between philosophy and religion; notably theology, was formal: philosophers talk of God, using thereby their natural reason, whereas theologians talk of God on the authority of divine revelation.

Strictly speaking Hegel will endorse this traditional view. As a typical post-kantian thinker, however, he will no longer uncritically consider divine revelation as an immediate supernatural message. Talking in terms of divine revelation will be interpreted by Hegel as a typically religious way of talking. What is meant by divine revelation will have to be unveiled by the philosopher as a specifically religious and, moreover, limited way of presenting its object.

Religious and philosophical discourse have a different epistemological status. The difference between both, however, is not that in the former case God would be the speaking subject (through his Revelation) whereas in the latter it would be man (through natural reason). In both cases it is God as well as man who is speaking. If God manifests himself, this can only happen in and through

9. *Ibid.*

human thinking. So religion and philosophy are two different ways of human thinking: religion thinks in terms of representations ("Vorstellungen"), while philosophy thinks in conceptual terms¹⁰.

Of course, religion is more than just a representation of God and its relation to man. For Hegel, indeed religious representations need to be completed by religious cult and devotion. But whoever wants to understand the difference between religion and philosophy, has to bear in mind the specific and limited possibilities of human representative faculty¹¹.

First of all, representation is an interiorization of sensory intuition ("Anschauung"). Therefore religious representation offers us a whole series of images, won from immediate, sensory intuition, but indicating something else than what they immediately refer to. In image there is a dichotomy between it and its signification, between the form of expression and its meaning. Thus religion expresses itself in the form of symbols, metaphors and allegories, which all owe their expressiveness to the world of sense perception. Saying that God has begotten a son, that God is angry, speaking about the tree of knowledge are exemplary forms of metaphorical speaking.

The same can be said of myths, which seem to reproduce historical facts, but which in fact have an imaginary character. Myths have a hidden, inner signification indicated by the story. To interpret them as if they were historical accounts would be a misjudgment. Even when authentic historical facts are told, e. g., concerning the life

10. For the relation between religion and philosophy we refer to Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 61-81 and to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, transl. from the 2nd German Edition by E. B. Speirs e. a. 3 vol., London - New York: 1962, vol. I, p. 12-35.

11. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I, p. 142-149.

of Jesus, it is not so much the mere human, historical facts which are intended as the divine sense which is ascribed to them. Though representative consciousness as such sticks to the sensory forms of time and space without a clear consciousness of the inner meaning of images, myths and accounts of historical events, it still has a sensitive "dim recognition" of this meaning¹².

Religious representation, however, is not limited to images and myths, which are both rooted in the sensory world of man. Also non-sensory figurations can appear as representations, namely, spiritual contents, acts and relations which are represented in their most simple form. So even the name of God himself has to be considered as a representation. The reason does not have to be sought in the common believer's view of God as a great old man with a white beard. The common believer knows that God is beyond similar sensory image. "God" is a representation because he is presented as a simple entity, although he has to be considered as a complex reality with multiple qualifications¹³. What makes a representation a representation is the form, by which also spiritual contents are considered as if they were simple atoms which can only be related to each other in an external way. God and world, e.g., are opposed to each other as if they were two different substances. Even the concepts of wisdom, goodness or justice, attributed to God as his predicates, are just representations as long as they are not analysed and thought in their mutual internal relationship. Representations lack the inner, necessary relationship with the other of themselves. Thus relations on the level of representation remain external and accidental. God's creation of the world, e.g., is to be considered a relationship between God and world, which at least from the standpoint of God, is completely accidental. God has not created

12. Ibid, p. 147

13. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Teil I, *Einleitung*. *Der Begriff der Religion*, ed. by W. Jaeschke, Hamburg, 1983, p. 295 (the text is lacking in the 2nd ed.).

the world by inner necessity. The world — and even creation as such — remains external to the representation of God, whereas the philosophical concept of God entails the inner and necessary unity of these representations.

Though for Hegel also images and symbols belong to the realm of representation, it is clear that first of all representation means to him a spiritual content posited already in the form of thought and not only in a sensory form. Representation then is distinguished from conceptual thought by the fact that although representation already has got the form of thought, it is not yet posited as such¹⁴.

Consequently, representation occupies a typical position in between sense perception and conceptual thought. It is the negation of what belongs to the order of images, because it realizes that the issue at stake is the inner meaning of things, not their sensory form. But nevertheless it is not able to free itself from the sensory: the different determinations of thought are still placed one next to the other on the model of sensory objects, which appear one next to the other in space and succeed each other in time.

Real thinking on the contrary considers the different determinations of thought as inner moments of the idea itself. When a determinate concept is related to another in thought, this does not happen on empirical grounds, but is based on an analysis of the concept itself. The dialectical method is nothing but the activity of thought, whereby the specific conception of a thing refers to its other, so that the other appears to belong to the concept of the thing itself. Representation is not dialectical yet. In a permanent state of unrest it remains floating between sense perception and thought.

Now, what distinguishes philosophy from religion is that it is a thinking consideration of its objects, and not

14. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. I. p. 144.

just a representation of them. Philosophy dissolves simple determinations into a multiplicity of determinations, which are considered according to their immanent coherence.

Hence it will be clear that a philosophical thinking of God is superior to religious representation. This explains why religion itself strives to overcome its own deficiency and tends to the thinking of God. Traditional theology is the result of this tendency and therefore Hegel's appreciation of mediaeval scholasticism is not that remarkable: it has tried not only to represent God, but also to think of Him¹⁵. As a matter of fact, however, mediaeval theology offers us a mixture of representation and thinking and we will have to wait for Descartes before thinking frees itself definitely from representation.

From Modern Times on religion is — at least in principle — no longer dominant in culture. It has to give way to the higher consideration of God, which is philosophy. The philosophers are the new priests of modern society and philosophy has to be considered the continuation of religion ("fortgesetzter Gottesdienst").

This does not mean that religion as such has to be eliminated. Just as perception, representation and thought are necessary dimensions of subjective spirit, so art (which is active in the medium of perception) and religion as well as philosophy are necessary expressions of absolute spirit. We just have to remember that neither art nor religion can be the dominant forms to express man's relationship with God any more.

III. Hegel's God

The consequences of Hegel's distinction between religious and philosophical discourse, between representation and thought, are particularly important.

In contrast with the rationalistic-deistic tradition of the Enlightenment Hegel takes religious representations

15. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, vol. I, p. 80.

very seriously. They are not forms of superstition, but manifestations of truth. Thus Hegel legitimates not only christian dogmatics but also the contents of other religions. Every religion — however primitive it may be — reveals partial aspects of truth. Therefore Hegel's lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion* will offer us a philosophical interpretation, not only of the phenomenon of religion in general, but also of the different particular religions, from Hinduism to Christianity. His philosophy of religion is to be considered as a translation of religious language into philosophical.

Thus, when asking the question of Hegel's God, it is clear that we have to direct our attention to Hegel's conceptual thinking. Hegel will not construct religious representations. These are to be found in the existing religions. As a philosopher Hegel tries to think of God exclusively on a rational base, independently of all factual religion.

This is carried through so consistently that in his philosophy even the name of God had to disappear. This name indeed belongs to the realm of representation and not to that of thought. When thought is a question of concepts, names are out of place. Already in the *Preface* of his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel remarks that the name "God" as such is empty and that it might be expedient to avoid it¹⁶.

Strictly speaking there is no place for the name "God" in Hegel's philosophical system. Hegel just uses it for pedagogical reasons, in order to give his religious readers some points of reference.

Nevertheless, if philosophy and religion have the same object, the question arises which concept or concepts shall take the place of the name "God". We can tackle

16. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by A. V. Miller, Oxford: 1977, p. 40,

the question by answering that Hegel sees God just as natural theology did in the past. In traditional theology God was defined as "being", as "infinite" or as "absolute". However, instead of dissolving those predicates in God being the subject, Hegel, we might say, has the tendency to dissolve God in his predicates. According to Hegel, "being", "infinite", "absolute" etc. are not just attributes of God, they are the very essence of God himself. They are the expressions of God in the form of thought. Thus, when we try to think of God, we can drop the name "God" and direct our attention to the concept of God.

At first sight, this procedure seems to involve the loss of God's subjectivity, which is very essential at least to religious representation. However, it only seems so. Our choice of concepts, expressing God's essence, was too limited. "Being", e.g., is just the very first, and therefore the poorest expression of God. Finally, God has to be thought as the Concept itself, and this necessarily involves subjectivity.

Anyway, if we want to think God, we will have to consider concepts, which have a "divine" nature. These concepts indeed, appear to be the very basis of any thinking on reality. More precisely, the concepts we are talking about are constituting rationality, thought itself. Hegel deals with them in their mutual connection, in his *Science of Logic*, which aims at offering us a thinking of thinking (cf. Aristotle's definition of God as *nóesis nóeseos*). However, Hegel's logic is not just an exposition of mere subjective forms of thinking. At the same time, they have an objective character, or better, they constitute objectivity, as well as subjectivity. Therefore Hegel's logic is not just logic, but also metaphysics. Hegel refuses to consider logical categories as if they were just instruments we would have at our disposal in order to get hold of the world. It is not we indeed, who have these categories at our disposal; it is rather the forms of thinking which have us in their power — and not only us, but also whatever there

is in the world¹⁷. So logic is the basis of Hegel's philosophy of nature as well as of his philosophy of spirit.

Thus, it is proper to logic that the opposition between the thought and its object, which is characteristic of consciousness, is dissolved. "Pure science (logic) presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains thought, in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness in its self-development and has the shape of the self, so that the absolute truth of being is the known concept and the concept as such is the absolute truth of being."¹⁸

This passage makes clear Hegel's idealistic point of view. Thinking and being are one in the concept: what is in-and-for-itself is the known concept and the concept as such is what is in-and-for-itself. Logic is just the systematic exposition of the concept as such, of what has been called *noûs* by Anaxagoras, or *idéa* by Plato, or God in religion. The content of logic, indeed, is nothing but "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit"¹⁹.

With this remarkable observation Hegel gives us the key to his philosophical understanding of God. What religion calls God is just rationality as such (*noûs*), the universal as such (*idéa*).

Hegel's logic is speculative theology: it is the explanation of the internal structure of God as such, before creation of nature and finite spirit. In other words, the concept as such, the *lógos*, is explained in its pure form — independently of the question how it receives a real configuration in the world of nature and man²⁰.

17. *Science of Logic*, transl. by A. V. Miller London-New York: 1969, p.35.

18: *Ibid*, p. 49.

19. *Ibid*, p. 50.

20. Later, a Left Hegelian as L. Feuerbach will exclude the possibility of a logic independent of finite subjective spirit. Cf. *infra*.

Insofar as God is considered independently of his creation — or, in philosophical terms — insofar as thought is considered as such, independently of its actualisation in reality, logic is abstract and incomplete. "The system of logic is the realm of shadows, the world of simple essentialities, freed from all sensuous concreteness²¹. Thus logic requires completion by a philosophy of reality: a philosophy of nature and a philosophy of spirit.

Nevertheless, logic remains the essence of all reality. It is not just the abstract universal, it is the universal which includes in itself the whole wealth of particulars²².

What is exposed in logic is thus not an abstraction, but highest actuality. Just as in Hegel's opinion Platonic ideas may not be put in a separate world, apart from the sensory world, logical determinations of thought may not be dissociated from the real world. A similar dualism would confer a proper substantiality on the sensory world which, as a matter of fact, it has not got. The aim of Plato's theory of ideas was precisely to show that only in its concept does a sensible thing possess actuality. Insofar as sensible things are different from their concepts, they are a mere non-entity, they cease to be actual²³. Similarly the universal logical forms are the basis of reality. Without this basis reality would be nothing.

Summarizing we can conclude that what has been called God by religion is nothing but the whole of forms of thinking, which constitute the structure of reality. They constitute the eternal substance of the world, that which in the changing world remains in-and-for-itself.

This is not the place to explain these logical structures in their mutual relations. As has been said before,

21. *Science of Logic*, p. 58.

22. *Ibid*, p.59

23. *Ibid*, p. 50

we again find the traditional attributes of God: being, infiniteness, oneness, essence, absoluteness, actuality, etc. It is very important, however, that Hegel demonstrates how these attributes only have signification insofar as they are enriched with their opposites. Thus, God is not merely being: He is being including at the same time non-being, or, in other words, becoming, process; He is not just the infinite, but the infinite realizing itself in the finite; He is not just the one, but the one unfolding itself in multiplicity; He is not just essence but appearing essence, not just the universal, but the universal including particularity.

This dialectical coherence of opposites, essential for the structure of the world, has been intuitively understood already by Christian religion, when it has presented God — before the creation of the world — as trinity, i. e., as a unity of opposites. The one God is understood as Spirit, being the unity of the opposites, who are the Father and the Son. Through these anthropological images of three persons in one God, we come upon the fundamental theological insight that God is essentially unity of opposites.

This unity may be explicated on different levels. The highest level, including all other levels, is that of the absolute idea. The idea is explained by Hegel as the absolute unity of the concept and its objectivity²⁴. Other definitions are that the idea is reason, subject-object, the unity of the ideal and the real, of the finite and the infinite, of soul and body; that it is possibility which has its actuality in its own self, that of which the nature can be thought only as existent etc.²⁵ The point, however, is that the idea is the concept carrying out itself in objectivity and that the object is inward design, essential subjectivity²⁶.

24. *Encyclopaedia*, 213: *The Logic of Hegel*, p. 352.

25. *Ibid*, 214: p. 355.

26. *Ibid*, 214 Anm.; p. 356,

The structure of reality is nothing but truth itself. Truth, however, is primarily not conceived by Hegel as "adaequatio intellectus et rei", but as adequation of the thing (*Sache*) with its concept. A true state, e. g., is a state which as a reality is adequate to what it has to be in virtue of its concept. In truth the basis of all reality is concealed. An object has real actuality insofar as it is an expression of the idea, insofar as it is realization of the concept.

Thus Hegel has analysed God in a philosophical way: God is eternal truth, absolute idea, unity of the concept and its objectivity. Hence what religion has called the creation of the world and mankind is interpreted by Hegel as the necessity that the idea realizes itself effectively in nature and finite spirit. Only then the idea is also actual. Thinking reality as the unity of the concept and its objectivity is not enough. This unity has to realize itself. Speaking religiously, we could say that God had to create the world in order to manifest himself as God. The idea has to get effective objectivity and in this objectivity it has to externalize itself.

Nature, then, is the idea in its exteriority, the idea giving a shape in time and space to itself. In nature the concept is not lost. On the contrary, it is present in it, but only in the modus of being. The concept is giving itself a shape in nature, but without being conscious of itself. Consciousness is only effected in the thought and the will of finite spirit. Insofar as the idea entails not only the moment of being, of objectivity, but also that of reflection, of subjectivity, its realization requires not only the existence of nature, but also of the finite spirit, whose essence is precisely subjectivity, ideality, reflection. Spirit is the being-there ("Dasein") of the concept as such, of subjectivity. It presupposes nature as the being-there of the concept in its objectivity, in its being-other, but at the same time it rises above nature. Only in spirit the idea arrives at its effective realization. In that sense spirit is the only real actuality. At first the logical idea had to be considered as the real substance, while nature and

finite spirit had to be asserted as its attributes. More precisely, however, only spirit, is real actuality, while logical idea and nature have to be considered as its moments which have no reality in themselves, but only as moments of spirit. If only in spirit the idea comes to be conscious of itself, it is only in spirit that the idea is fully idea. Only spirit is really *noésis noíseos*.

Translating these fundamental philosophical insights into theological language, we could say that God is only fully God on condition that, first, he also creates nature and finite spirit (creating is not accidental, but essential for the godness of God); and, secondly, on condition that the finite spirit becomes conscious of God.

It is essential to God to be acknowledged as such by the finite spirit. This acknowledgment comes into being when the finite spirit raises itself above its own finiteness and becomes absolute, notably in art, religion and philosophy. In these three spheres the finite spirit raises itself to God. Together they constitute what Hegel calls the sphere of absolute spirit.

In works of art the idea as the unity of the concept and its objectivity is given for intuition in an exterior form. Religion is the interiorization and representation of the idea, whereas in philosophy the idea is thought as such. Thus in these three forms thinking of thinking becomes actuality.

Now, it is important to see that absolute spirit is not just the sphere in which the finite spirit raises itself to the absolute, to God. At the same time it is absolute spirit, or God, who in and through intuition, representation and thought of finite spirit becomes conscious of himself and thus realises himself as spirit. Hence, it is impossible to turn Hegel into a captive of either an immanent or a transcendent conception of God.

On the one hand, Hegel recognizes the transcendency of God insofar as the logos, the idea is not some-

thing man disposes of. God is the substance, the basis of his being. God as absolute spirit constitutes the essence of man, and as his essence, He is transcending him fundamentally. On the other hand, this essence does not exist apart from its appearance in man and world. Placing God outside man and world would entail man and world still having their own signification apart from God, which would injure God's omnipotence.

Christian religion has been very well aware of the inner link between God and man, which found its expression in the idea of incarnation. God's Son, who constitutes the moment of finiteness in God, had to come down to the earth and take the real shape of a man. In the historical person of Jesus the necessity of God's incarnation has become visible. In Jesus, God has revealed himself in his finitude — and this in a radical way: by dying the death every man has to die. The death of God on Good Friday is the expression of the painful necessity that God could not remain self-sufficient on his own, but that he had to go the way of finiteness until the bitter end. Good Friday, however, is followed by Resurrection Day and Pentecost. The Resurrection of Christ is the expression of the fact that God, in spite of death, is a living God. This may not be understood in a mythical way. God is living as Spirit in His Communion. When the Christian Communion in its pious cult rises to God and in its action follows Christ's spirit, then God is effectively present amongst men. When humanity in its thinking is aware of its spiritual character, when in its acting it realizes what has to be according to its concept, it is absolute spirit in the fullest sense of the word: it is spirit freely realizing itself in rational thinking and acting.

For religious consciousness this thinking and acting still has an external character. Finally, it is all the work of God, who in religious representation remains opposed to man. For the philosopher, however, absolute spirit is thinking and acting in and through the thinking and acting of man himself. Culture of Modern Times has dissolved

the exteriority inherent to the religious form of thinking. The very content of Christian religion is the presence of God amongst men. This presence, however, is represented in an inadequate form. The task of Modern Philosophy is to solve the discrepancy between form and content of Christian religion by explaining the whole or reality as the selfrealization of spirit.

IV. From Hegel to Marx

It is without doubt that for Hegel religion — and notably Christian religion — is an essential figure of spirit. Religion is more than just a moment which has been overcome in history; it remains an eternal moment of absolute spirit. Therefore Hegel's elder pupils — the so called Right Wing Hegelians — tried to demonstrate after Hegel's death that he was an orthodox Lutheran.

Left Wing Hegelians, on the contrary, have argued that Hegel had to be considered a pantheist, whose philosophy needs must lead to naturalism and atheism. The figures of B. Bauer, L. Feuerbach and K. Marx can be called symptomatic of this appreciation.

a) B. Bauer's atheistic interpretation of Hegel

As has been said before, B. Bauer is explicating his position towards the Right Wing Hegelians and towards Hegel himself in his ironical pamphlet *On the Trump of Doom. On Hegel, Atheist and Antichristian* (1841). The title and foremost the subtitle are very clear. B. Bauer talks from the point of view of an orthodox Lutheran, who, with the help of a great number of citations from the Bible, demonstrates Hegel's atheism. Thus, B. Bauer wants to show that the denial of God and Christ by the Young Hegelians could not be seen as a betrayal of the master. The master himself was guilty already.

Of course, Hegel has spoken continuously about God as a living, personal God, Creator of heaven and earth. And he has always defined religion as a relation of the

individual with God, in which the former gives up his singularity in order to give himself completely to the Universal, which is God.

In fact, however, this is only a rather transparent veil, behind which Hegel is hiding his real intention: to prepare the destruction of religion. According to Bauer, the kernel of Hegel's system is that the religious relation of man to God is nothing but the inner relationship of human self-consciousness towards itself. Man's relationship to God is nothing but man's relationship to himself. "This philosophy does not want any God or gods such as the pagans: it only wants men, only self-consciousness."²⁷

In Bauer's eyes Hegel is hiding behind the theological veil of his system nothing less than an atheistic humanism.

Of course, Hegel is arguing continuously that God has to be acknowledged as the substance, apart from which man is absolutely nothing. Therefore, Hegel says that anyone who wants to become a philosopher has to start becoming a Spinozist. Bauer, however, remarks that for Hegel human consciousness has to be considered a necessary moment in the unfolding of God. Only in finite spirit, in man, God as absolute spirit comes to consciousness of himself.

For Hegel, religion is nothing but self-consciousness of absolute spirit. Thus, religion is not just a matter of man only; in the first place it is a matter of God. The consequence of this view is that God as substance is not alien to man, that He is no stranger. On the contrary, He is the essence of man himself. In one and the same act God knows himself in the finite consciousness of man, and man beholds his own essence in God²⁸. Thus, Bauer says, Hegel appears to be a pantheist, which is clearly contrary to Christian belief in a personal God and a Saviour of fallen mankind²⁹.

27. B. Bauer, *Die Posaune des jungsten Gerichts*, in *Die Hegelsche Linke*, sel. and ed. by K. Loewith, stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: 1962, p. 151.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 157

29. *Ibid.*

The fact that Hegel tries to correct his pantheism by arguing that God has to be thought not only as a substance, but also as a subject, does not make a real difference. Divine subjectivity, indeed, is not conceived by Hegel as a particular person. It is only real in finite spirit, i. e., in man. Although the latter thereby is giving up his finiteness so that only universal infinite self-consciousness remains, the result remains nothing less than an absolutizing of man's self-consciousness.

b) Feuerbach's anthropotheism

It is no surprise then that Bauer's pamphlet, which had been edited anonymously, has at first been ascribed to L. Feuerbach. Feuerbach indeed had argued in his main work, *The Essence of Christianity*, that Christian religion had to be considered from an anthropological point of view. What in Christianity appears as God is nothing but the product of a fundamental alienation. Man has alienated whatever belongs to his own essence, and has attributed this to an alien being, i.e., God. Thus, as a matter of fact, in Christian religion man is relating himself to himself as if he were an alien being. Man's consciousness of God is, in fact, man's self-consciousness.

It is certain that Bauer would endorse Feuerbach's view. But inversely, Feuerbach did not want to see his philosophy reduced to that of Bauer. In an article *On the Review of the Book 'The Essence of Christianity'* (1842) he explains why *The Trump of Doom* cannot be written by himself. My work, Feuerbach argues, cannot be read as an explanation of Hegel's system; it has to be read in opposition to Hegel. Feuerbach wants his philosophy to be a break with speculative philosophy, not its radicalisation³⁰.

30. L. Feuerbach, *Zur Beurteilung der Schrift "Das Wesen des Christentums"*, *Werke in sechs Banden*, ed. by E. Thies, Frankfurt/M., 1975-6, vol. 3, *Kritiken und Abhandlungen II*, P. 210.

Feuerbach breaks with Hegel because, in fact, his speculative philosophy (particularly his logic) is still theology. Though Hegel is negating theology, this negation remains within the viewpoint of theology itself. Just as it transforms man's essence into a transcendent being outside man himself, so does Hegel's logic set man's thinking outside man himself³¹.

The great difference between Hegel and Feuerbach becomes manifest, when we see how, to Feuerbach, everything that Hegel considers to be secondary becomes essential. "Perception", "Feeling", and "Heart" are terms, which are not absent in Hegel's philosophy, but they all belong to the finite spirit, which as absolute spirit has to overcome his own finiteness. Feuerbach, on the contrary, considers everything belonging to the finiteness of human spirit, essential. When Hegel considers the finite to be, though necessary, just a moment of the infinite, Feuerbach, on the contrary, will reduce the infinite into an aspect of the finite³². Instead of considering absolute spirit to be the truth of finite spirit, Feuerbach considers finite spirit to be the truth of absolute spirit.

In other words, art, religion and philosophy are just expressions of subjective spirit, and nothing more³³.

Thus, Feuerbach wants to set Hegel on his feet: the speculative point of view, which considers the whole reality "*sub specie aeterni*", has to be given up in order to consider it exclusively from the human point of view. Hence Feuerbach will plead for an anthropotheism³⁴. "Philosophy can only have man as its subject — man who *is* and *knows himself* as the self-conscious essence of nature, as the essence of history, as the essence of the states, as the essence of religion — man who *is* and

31. *Ibid*, *Vorläufige Thesen Zur Reformation der Philosophie*, in *Id.*, p. 225.

32. *Ibid*, *Zur Beurteilung...*, in *Id.*, p. 210-2.

33. *Ibid*, *Vorläufige Thesen...*, in *Id.*, p. 226

34. *Ibid*, p. 236.

knows himself as the *real* (not imaginary) absolute identity of all oppositions and contradictions, of all active and passive, spiritual and sensory, political and social qualities — man who knows that the *pantheistic* essence, which, as an abstract being was isolated from man by speculative philosophers or rather theologians, is nothing but his *own undeterminate* essence, which, however, is capable of an indefinite number of determinations." ³⁵

c) K. Marx's criticism of religion and philosophy

In 1884 already Marx writes in the *German-French Yearbooks* that for Germany the criticism of religion is essentially terminated³⁶. The kernel of this criticism is summarized by him as follows: "Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again."³⁷ The reference to Feuerbach is obvious.

In Marx's eyes, however, criticism of religion is not enough. The further task consists in tracing the *ground* of man's alienation in religion. This ground is to be found in the fact that society, notably the system of wage-work and private property, is alienating man from himself. "Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man's inner life, but economical estrangement is that of *real life*; its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects."³⁸

Hence our conclusion must be that Feuerbach was not radical enough. Though he had emphasized that man is essentially a social being and that he can only realize

35. *Ibid*, p. 240.

36. K. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction* *Collected Works*, 1975 ff., vol. III, p. 175.

37. *Ibid*.

38. *Ibid*, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Id.*, p. 297

himself in society, he neglected criticizing the existing society³⁹. Marx, on the contrary, will argue that if man is nothing but the world of man, if man is state, society, then it is also the state, society that produces religion. When religion, then, offers a distorted consciousness of the world, it is because the state is a distorted world.

Religion is deluding man with an illusory happiness. As such it has a double function: on the one side, it is the expression of the real distress that man is living in; on the other side, it is also a protest against this distress. Precisely because of this ambiguity, religion is the opium of the people⁴⁰.

Hence, criticism of religion will have to uncover the illusory character of religious happiness in order to realize man's real happiness. Giving up religious illusions, however, implies the suppression of the situation which causes such illusions. Criticism of the heaven must change into criticism of the earth; criticism of religion must change into criticism of right; criticism of theology into criticism of politics⁴¹.

Taking into consideration these theses, we can see that Marx is no longer interested in Hegel's philosophy of religion as such. It is Hegel's philosophy of right that Marx wants to criticize. He will argue that Hegel's political philosophy is corresponding to the actual political situation in Germany. Hence, it is not sufficient to be content with theoretical criticism. Real criticism has to debouch in a praxis, which must emancipate man from the situation of slavery in which he is immersed. The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence, with the *categorical imperative to overthrow*

39. Cf. L. Feurbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, transl. by M. H. Vogel, Indianapolis-New York, 1966, p. 71-3.

40. K. Marx, *Contribution, Collected Works*, vol. III, p. 175.

41. *Ibid*, p. 175-6.

all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being."⁴²

From now on Marx will direct his attention, not to the content of religion, but to the way religion is functioning in society, notably as a form of ideology. Hence, the first task is no longer to emancipate man from theology as Feuerbach thought — but from oppressing economic structures.

V. Conclusion

Looking back at the Young Hegelians, reception of Hegel we can see how Hegel's philosophy of religion has worked in a double way.

First the Young Hegelians have followed Hegel where he tried to give a secularized interpretation of the world. Philosophy being superior to religion, theology has to give way to logic, which is the conceptual explanation of God in His very essence.

Secondly, however, the Young Hegelians held the view that Hegel had not gone far enough in his endeavour to emancipate philosophy from religious domination. Therefore they all broke with him finally. They rejected logic for it being a hidden form of theology in order to plead for a radical anthropology.

This anthropology was at first developed by B. Bauer in a still idealistic and Hegelian way: man is essentially consciousness and self-consciousness. Feuerbach, on the contrary, considers sensuality to be man's essence: if man is at the same time heart and head, it is the heart which has absolute priority. Marx, finally, is of opinion that even Feuerbach's anthropology remains too idealistic, and this because it remains too theoretical. It is not enough just to interpret the world. Changing it is important. It is no

longer religion's and even philosophy's claims of truth that have to be examined. They are just forms of ideology with the particular function of legitimating and reproducing dominant class-structures.

Thus, what Hegel considered to be the most important parts of his philosophy have been amputated: the realm of logic as well as that of absolute spirit has finally been rejected by his pupils.

Logic on the one hand had to make place for an empiristic and materialistic epistemology, referring more to Kant than to Hegel and following the steadily growing success of empiric science. Absolute spirit on the other hand, i. e., art, religion and philosophy, have to be considered the ideological super-structure of society, which basically is determined by the socio-economic relations. Thus the A (logic) and the Z (absolute spirit) of Hegel's philosophy have been eliminated. The question is whether this elimination has been carried through justly. Is there no need any more for a logic, analysing the most ultimate categories that allow us to talk about reality? And do we have no need anymore of art, religion or philosophy? Are they nothing more than legitimations of actual socio-economic structures? For Hegel, they were expressions of the way man situates himself in reality. Though Hegel may have overestimated the power of conceptual thinking, he has always been aware of the wonder of all wonders: that life appears to be meaningful. This "mysterious" fact constitutes the very heart of art, as well as of religion and philosophy. Refusing to reflect on this "mystery" means as much as condemning oneself to abstract thinking. Young Hegelians who called out loudly for a concrete philosophy — and the same can be said of more recent philosophical currents — can still learn something on this matter from their former master.

Katholieke Universiteit
te Leuven
Leuze straat 8
B-3540 Bellegem, Belgium

Paul Cruysberghs

‘Religion: Opium of the People’-

Marxian Concept of God

“Religion is the opium of the people — this dictum by Marx is the cornerstone of the whole Marxist outlook on religion”, wrote Lenin in his “The Attitude of the Worker’s Party to Religion.”¹

Today more than a third of humanity follows the Marxist system. Almost every country in the world has in one form or other embraced Marxism. Marx is today a living reality both in communist and capitalist countries. Will the untiring propaganda and the efforts of the communist nations bring the whole world, at some time, under the banner of Marxism?

Marx was deeply concerned with human problems: to help the exploited masses, to bring about equality and to usher in a classless society; to liberate the oppressed and to enable man to realize himself fully as man in society. Marx was convinced: capitalism impoverishes man and dehumanizes humanity; religion causes self-alienation and enslaves man to structures and destroy his ‘revolutionary energy’. Hence elimination of both capitalism and religion, asserted Marx, would establish universal brotherhood and a paradise on earth where there would be no war, no poverty, no struggle or class discrimination.

In the subsequent development of the history of Marxism, both the opponents as well as supporters of Marx have given their own interpretations of this axiom:

1. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 402-403

"religion is the opium of the people". What did Marx really want to convey? Did he attempt at negating God and abolishing religion? In order to assess and interpret aright we have to investigate first what Marx meant by religion. Undoubtedly, his criticism of religion and his concept of God can be adequately understood only against the background of the philosophy of Hegel and the anthropology of Feuerbach on which it is based.

I. The impact of the Hegelian Dialectic and the Anthropology of Feuerbach on Marx

The manifold facets of Hegelian thought and the interpretation of man and history imbued Marx with the importance of dialectic. The young Marx was influenced by Hegel (1770-1831), the German philosopher, who made a tremendous impact on the modern Western thought. He had developed a philosophy of history in which the Absolute Mind (Spirit) was seen as the dynamic motor of history that vests it with meaning and coherence. According to Hegel's triadic construction (thesis: subjective mind, antithesis: objective mind, and synthesis: absolute mind) religion occupies the second stage of the 'absolute spirit' as the manifestation of God. The process of dialectical thinking enables the thinker himself to take part in the self-thinking of the absolute (God). Therefore, God, the absolute spirit, realizes himself fully in the man who has speculative knowledge; creation is fulfilled in him².

Hegel believed that religions express symbolically man's understanding of himself, expressing in the form of beliefs where his true image of himself does not reflect, because he is in a perpetual process of development. In religion, Hegel means, "man attributes to what is outside himself, qualities that are essentially human" because of his incapacity to understand himself or the

2. I. Fetscher, "Developments in the Marxist Critique of Religion",
m VI, 2 (Church and World, Nr. 2), 1966, p. 58

social world. Consequently, religion according to Hegel is "a form of self-externalization — a projection of the self and its attributes on to something outside itself, or imagined to be so". The two watchwords of his philosophy may be mentioned here: 'self-externalization' and 'self-estrangement'³.

Hegel as a theologian gave due respect to Christianity; he did not even say that philosophy supersedes religion. Hegel was not an iconoclast or revolutionary in his religious outlook — he never thought of religion as a class ideology. Marx adopted the Hegelian dialectical thinking and the concept of alienation and its overcoming. But he rejected the idealism of Hegel. Marx 'inverted' Hegel's idealism; he subordinated thinking to matter. Marx's point of departure was the concrete reality rather than thought — his was a materialistic conception of history.

Similarly, Marx rejected the notion of history as the self-expression of the Absolute Mind (Spirit). He criticized the Hegelian idealistic concept of man and the process of self-alienation and its overcoming as mental act rather than an objective reality. The reason is Marx opted for the primacy of matter rather than thought. He remarked in the *Holy Family*: "It is impossible to separate thought from matter that thinks"⁴. For Marx the dialectical process is not a movement of thought about reality, but the movement of reality itself, the historical process. Alienation is a fact and not a thought-process.

More than the Hegelian dialectic, Feuerbach's (1804-1872) anthropology influenced Marx in formulating his concept of religion. Feuerbach's works, *Thoughts Concerning Death and Immortality* and *The Essence of Christianity* contain the major part of his critique of religion and interpretation of man. He claimed to be rigidly empirical

3. See for details J. Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, Oxford; 1975, p. 230

4. See Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, NY; 1964, p. 63 ff

in his method. He stated that "man does not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object", and he claimed to be a 'natural philosopher'.

According to Feuerbach only objects of sense are real and his philosophy is essentially humanistic; he defined religion as a form of projective spirit in man — religion is imaginary, "the dream of the human mind", it is nothing but man's objectified consciousness of himself, consciousness of his own infinite nature.

It is the 'theogonic wish' of man, according to Feuerbach, that gives birth to God's existence. Because man cannot transcend his own nature his religious ideas reflect his own anthropomorphic personality. Feuerbach's 'theory of the wish' sees God as the fulfilment of his wishes. In his attempt to break down both theology and speculative philosophy into anthropology Feuerbach chose positivism as the methodical principle: "Philosophy is the perception of what is. To think of and perceive things and beings as they are, this is the highest law, and the highest task of philosophy."⁵

God cannot be, according to Feuerbach, an actual and existent reality, but is the product of human imagination. The many names that stand for God indicate that there is not one God but a species of gods, which challenges the validity of One-God assertion. According to Feuerbach, God is not a being or a subject but, rather, a property and a predicate. Man provides the predicate, for he expresses thereby his own feelings. Since he receives a multitude of impressions from nature, he believes in a plethora of gods; the multitude of men create a multitude of gods. God is nothing but the impression which nature produces in man and through man. Religion is the unrealized potentialities of man; religious values, belief in God are nothing but projections of man's subjective nature and ideals. God is man's highest subjectivity, abstracted from himself.

5. *Samtliche Werke*, p. 459, cit. *Concilium*, Ibid., p. 59

Feuerbach maintains in his *Essence of Christianity* that religion is not only the projection of man's essence but also the object of man's nature. Man's consciousness of the infinite implied in religion is, in fact, the consciousness of his own infinity. So he says: "The consciousness of the infinity is nothing else but the consciousness of the infinite consciousness."⁶

In his *Essence of Christianity* the identity of Man-God is clearly expounded. "The object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken subjectively. Such as are man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God. By his God you know a man and by the man his God; the two are identical."⁷ Here Feuerbach identifies the divine with the human. "The divine being is nothing else than the human being.....freed from the limits of the individual, that is contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being....."⁸

According to Feuerbach man contains within himself God, a distinct being, nay, he is God par excellence. In this sense consciousness of religion is identified with self-consciousness. As religious consciousness is within man, we have to know man to know God. For "God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of man. Religion is the solemn unveiling of man's hidden treasure"⁹. Here we confront Feuerbach's peak of anthropocentrism.

Religious feelings, says Feuerbach, alienate man from his true nature and generate belief in the objective 'other' — God vested with all the best qualities, and man with the worst. This is because he projects his own essence creating a creator for himself though he is his own creator. Because of this projection creator-creation, he sets God over against himself as an opposed being: God as infinite, man as finite; God as perfect, man as

6. Motilal Pandit, *Marx's Concept of History*, p. 15

7. Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, London: 1854, p. 12

8. *Ibid.* p. 17

9. Feuerbach, *Ibid.*, p. 12

imperfect; God holy and man sinful. Two opposing poles meet together: God as the absolute, the essence of essence, and man as mortal, nothingness. It emerges from man's projecting his essence to the transcendent sphere, objectifying it and making himself insignificant and worthless.

In Feuerbach's anthropology, theology becomes insignificant because man is the central, the highest object, an end unto himself. There is nothing transcendent or supernatural. There is no God in Himself or God *for me*. This difference arises only if we perceive God (object) differently from the way it is perceived.

Feuerbach's criticism of religion is entirely negative. He conceived the material, tangible, concrete and perceptible only as truly real. Man should cultivate faith in his own future, in his powers. As he substituted anthropology for theology he failed to give any theological interpretation of the world, man or history. Theology is reduced to anthropology, and idealism to materialism. "The image of God is the manifestation of essential humanity. Man is the being, God is the thought. Bereft of all ideal attributes that he conceives as belonging not to him but to God instead of realizing his human potentialities, he consoles himself with a purely imaginary, therefore pseudo-realization of himself in his idea of God. 'The impoverishing of the real world and the enriching of God is one act.'"¹⁰ And many aspects of Marxian critique of religion are found in Feuerbach: "the emphasis on the materialist concrete reality of man, the 'retrotransformation' of the predicates hypostatized in God into qualities in man (as being of the species); the formula: 'thought springs from being, but being does not spring from thought'; the synthesis of active (conscious) and passive (emotional) principle as being German and French in essence and so on"¹¹.

10. Motilal, *Ibid*, p. 20

11. *Essence of Christianity*, p. 120

Marx criticized Feuerbach for neglecting the dialectical method of Hegel and minimizing the importance and the significance of 'revolutionary', of 'practical-critical' activity¹². The truth must be proved in practice, that is, "the reality and power, the this-sidedness (*Diesseitigkeit*) of man's thinking"¹³. While Feuerbach held that the concept of God is derived from the thought and temperament of individuals, Marx wanted the conditions that prompt the individuals to develop religious concepts to be investigated. Marx states that Feuerbach did not perceive the 'religious sentiment' to be a social product and that he did not understand man in relation to history, and hence was unable to grasp the role, the means of production play in the shaping of human beliefs.

Marx gave the utmost importance to 'socialized' humanity; philosophers interpreted the world in various ways but the point, Marx asserts, is to change it¹⁴. Ultimately Marx aims at transferring Feuerbach's anthropology into a philosophy of reality with the aid of Hegel's dialectic: man is a material being, determined by the mode of production. In effect, in Feuerbach's 'Provisional Thesis' (1842), much of Marx's critique of religion is anticipated. Marx's point of departure of the critique of religion is the religious position of Feuerbach. Rightly it is said:

"Hegel genuit Feuerbach qui genuit Marx"

II. Religion: Opium of the people

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the kindliness of a heartless world, the spirit of unspiritual condition. It is the opium of the people."¹⁵

Neither Marx nor Engels adequately dealt with the problems of the origin of religion and morality. The conception of soul, morality, the idea of God, the super-

12. Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, p. 69

13. *Ibid*, p. 69-70.

14. *Ibid*, p. 72.

15. *Ibid*, p. 42

natural — ideas that belong to the ideological 'super-structure' of the Marxian society are either left nebulous or ignored. Obviously, Marx's primary concern was not about the social functions. But because the Marxist attention to certain functions of religion and morality was sporadic, we should not be overhasty in judging that Marxism utterly disregarded religion.

In the opening verse of Marx's famous statement on religion he says: "The critique of religion is the premise of all critiques."¹⁶ Why? Because religious man, according to Marx, lives in an illusory, dreamy world. Religious consciousness arises in man from an 'inverted' consciousness of man in an unjust society. Therefore Marx considered religion a mark of oppression and the 'sigh of the oppressed creature'. Religion is the source of man's alienation, and the criticism of religion means the unmasking of self-alienation. Marx sees the root of religion in the helplessness of man, his helplessness in the face of natural forces and calamities of nature, spirit, devil, angel etc. People pray to these powers either to appease them or to be protected from or by them. That gave birth to prayer, sacrifice, rites, priests, sorcerers and religious leaders, organizations and religious institutions — there begins the root of worship. In the *Anti-Dühring* we read: "All religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces."¹⁷

The basis of Marx's critique against religion is: "*Man makes Religion, religion does not make man*"¹⁸. According to Marx religion and religious feelings are not natural, but arose at a definite stage of development in the society. Ignorance of true causes of natural phenomena and social problems gave birth to religion. Marx

16. *Ibid*, p. 41

17. *Ibid*, p. 147

18. *Ibid*, p. 40

writes in *Das Kapital*: "Those ancient social organisms of production are, as compared with bourgeois society, extremely simple and transparent. But they are founded either on the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellowmen"^{18a}.

In the primitive tribal community man's life is narrow and he accepted his social conditions as *fate*. He is not 'oppressed' but is not free, because his way of life is not of his own making, but in line with the unalterable social situations; he has not yet "severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellowmen" in the sense that he lives within his clan and family ties and in a community which is not really autonomous because of its 'custom-boundedness'.

Another factor that rouses religious consciousness in man is his direct master-slave relationship. For Marx it is the lowest stage of development of man's means of work. So long as individuals do not develop their own individual consciousness, religious consciousness is bound to emerge. Marx envisages an ordered society, in which the relations of men to one another and to nature are clearly recognizable and acceptable: "The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan."¹⁹

Marx's analysis of history contains subtle criticism of religion. In the context of the dialectical method he says that different societies arose at different historical periods — most primitive society was followed by a society rampant with slavery; feudal and guild society was followed by the capitalist ones. Their emergence is due

18. a) *Ibid*, p. 135

19. *Ibid*, p. 136

to historical reasons. Religion underwent changes with the changes in the historical conditions. Marx means that the various types of religious development and the 'religious world is but the reflex of the real world'. In *Das Capital* Marx uses the analogy of fetish worship to explain the 'mystical character of commodities'²⁰. Here he narrates that "this narrowness is reflected in the ancient worship of Nature, and in the other elements of the popular religions"²¹.

All religion is a form of alienation. "Do not religious adherents feel themselves debased, enslaved, forsaken and despicable?" asks Marx^{21a}. Because religion is alienation, it is a hindrance to emancipation and enlightenment of man. Marx was convinced that religion and human liberation are opposing forces. Once the dualism is overcome then there is emancipation. Thus religion becomes the summit of alienation. People submit themselves to alien powers. In order to be independent they need to be liberated. "Religion is precisely, the recognition of man in a round-about way through an intermediary."²²

These intermediaries are Christ, Money and the State which are obstacles to human self-recognition and liberation. The very fact that man believes that he is created makes him dependent. Hence the idea of creation *ex nihilo* is rejected by Marx. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* we read: "A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet. And he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only

20. *Ibid*, p. 135,

21. *Ibid*, p. 136

21. a). *Ibid*, p. 50

22. Cit, Alfansyev, *Marxist Philosophy*, Moscow; 1965, p. 152

the maintenance of my life but if he has, moreover, created my life, if he is the source of my life."²³

Marx described religion in the capitalist society as the worship of Mammon. Money is their God and money is worshipped. "Money is the jealous god of Israel", says Marx, "in face of which no other god may exist. Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has, therefore, robbed the whole world — both the world of man and nature — of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him and he worships it."²⁴

The Marxian society does not necessarily militate against religion, but against the conditions that induce religious consciousness. It establishes the society in such a way that the religious inspiration becomes superfluous, where religious consciousness dies out. It will be a human society where man will take the place of God — he will be the creator of himself. "The sacred figure in religion, which results from self-alienation, is unholy because it is nothing but man's socio-economic alienation. If we have to make a critique of religion, says Marx, one must do so from the earth. The critique of religion will ultimately give us then the insight that man is the highest being; 'real self-hood can be established on the ruins of religion.'"²⁵ Consequently, philosophy must study social institutions and not supernaturalism, politics must replace theology, affirmation must take the place of religious negation and religion must be replaced by philosophy. With the 'realization' of philosophy no more denial of religion will be necessary, for the projection of the ideal beyond the real world is no longer needed. So the victory of socialism will cause the death of religion.

23. *Coll. Works, ibid.*, 3/304

24. *Ibid*, p. 3/172

25. *On Religion*, p. 42

The Marxian critique of religion and the critique of society go hand in hand. Because of the mystification of reality man lives in a dream world. Religion inspires hope for the golden age to come, while Marx insisted on transforming the existing world. "Man dreams about a dream world because his life on earth seems to be inappropriate. The very fact that human existence has separated itself from the earth and established a kingdom in the clouds explains the fact of internal division within the earthly foundation. Being not at home on earth, man is in need of religious 'consolation'. Religion thus becomes the expression of human distress. Religion has no content of its own: it is not fed by heaven, but by earth. It is, therefore, an epiphenomenon of social life."²⁶

Since religion is the oppression of distress and suffering, the 'sigh of the oppressed creature', it is also a protest against this suffering. But this protest remains ineffective because it diverts people's attention from this world to the hope of a next world to come. Thus religious phenomenon, the *sigh* that awakens protest, functions as opium, a narcotic or a sedative in the sense that it prompts one to accept earthly sufferings in the hope of future, transcendental happiness. But if we believe that true happiness can come only once the illusory happiness is abolished, illusory happiness offered by religion is to be renounced. Marx says: "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion"²⁷.

Religion preaches, according to Marx, subordination to exploiters, advocates blind adherence to fate, tempts people to lose their revolutionary energy, inducing them to accept sufferings as the will of God. Religion

26. Motilal Pandit, *Ibid*, p. 29

27. *On Religion*, p. 42

diverts people's attention from the concrete life-situation with the promise of a blissful life to come. The 'spiritless' world forces the soul to turn towards an 'other world', an ethereal world. Just as medicine does not cure but helps to alleviate pain, so religion gives happiness to the soul in an imaginary way, not *actually*.

Opium produces dreams that make people forget their worries for a moment but it in no way helps to eradicate it. Hence, first of all, the social consciousness of the people should be changed. Marx wants to root out the malady and not just alleviate it with 'opium'. Once the disease is cured the 'opium' becomes superfluous. So also religion will become superfluous once the 'self-estrangement in its unholy forms' is unmasked and socialism get the upperhand. In this sense we can truly understand the axiom: 'religion is the opium of the people'.

III. Marxian Concept of God

To speak of God in the Marxist ideology appear like a paradox. With a conceptual denial of transcendence and the supernatural it would be inappropriate to speak of God in the concept of Marxism. Philosophically, we could rather speak of an *a-theism* in Marxism and an *a-theocracy* in the Marxist form of government. But Marxian atheism is materialistic and at its best anthropocentric humanism, developed under the pattern of left wing Hegelians and Feuerbach's anthropology.

Atheism is not a phenomenon peculiar to Marxism alone; it is typical of modern western thought. Already in the Bible we read: "The fool says in his heart there is no God" (Ps. 14:1). From time immemorial, Hindus have developed schools of atheism, such as Carvaka, Sankhya and Jainism. The modern Indian thinker Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu."²⁸ What are the fundamental traits of

Marxian atheism? A Closer investigation of Marx's concept of God would inevitably lead us to the conclusion that Marx accepted the thought of Feuerbach and placed man in the place of God and substituted anthropology for theology. So to speak of God in Marx's understanding would be to speak of man whose consciousness is substituted for the supreme deity.

Marx, in his early years, was not an unbeliever altogether. In one of his Essays he wrote: "Who should not gladly endure sorrows when he knows that through his continuing in Christ, through his works, God is honoured?"²⁹. The same Marx wrote later: "If God exists as creator, then the human being becomes less important or indeed nothing"³⁰. In course of time Marx became not only a strong opponent of any supernatural concept, but he even campaigned against it. The very affirmation of God's existence seemed to him a sign of poverty, of the 'unhappy consciousness of man'^{30a}.

In the introduction to his doctoral thesis, 'The Difference between the natural Philosophy of Democritus and the natural Philosophy of Epicurus (1841) Marx expressed his 'hatred' towards all the gods; the consciousness of man alone is exalted as the supreme divinity: "there must be no god besides it"³¹. Marx's invective against the gods is clearly manifested in Prometheus: "In one word, I detest the whole pack of gods", and describing Prometheus as the 'noblest of saints' he says: "Prometheus' admission is its (Philosophy's) own admission, its own motto against all gods, heavenly and earthly, who do not acknowledge the consciousness of man as the supreme deity. There is no god on a level with it"³². Marx criticized any powers that stood in the way of fulfilment of man's potentialities

29. McIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, London; 1964, p. 29

30. Cit., J. G. Johnson, "God and Marxism" *Indian Journal of Theology*, 21/1972, Nr. 1-2, p. 111

30a. See: C. Mc Mullen, *Marxism and Religions of India*, 1979, p. 15

31. *On Religion*, p. 15

32. *Ibid*, p. 15

According to Marx the very existence of God as creator and sustainer of the universe would cause 'tension' in the dialectical materialism. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* Marx wrote: "Atheism...is no longer meaningful, for atheism is a negation of God and seeks to assert by this negation the existence of man. Socialism no longer requires such a roundabout method...it is a positive human self-consciousness."³³

According to Marxist philosophy, dialectical materialism governs the process of the development of the material world; dialectical materialism has to transform the world, it has a positive role to play to build up a society of equality and justice. Hromadka says in this connection: "We have to understand that the atheism of dialectical materialism is a positive struggle for man, for his adequate self-understanding, for a better order of social and political life, for a construction of a society in which all class differences will gradually fade away."³⁴

Marx propounded the thesis that the matter is not created, it is eternal, the ultimate reality. Matter is the source of life, and morality is to be sought in matter itself. There is no divine intervention in history, for man is the creator of history; universal history is nothing more than the procreation of man by human work³⁵. Hence the existence of a creator, God, becomes superfluous. If at all we can speak of a 'theological structure' in the Marxist system, it must be a structure turned upside down by atheistic negation or an 'inverted theocracy' or an a-theocracy resting on such a structure³⁶.

As stated, Marxist concept of God cannot be explained adequately without speaking of the concept of

33. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 167

34. J. Hromadka, *Theology Between Yesterday and Today*, Philad 1957 p. 83

35. J. G. Johnosn, *Ibid*, p. 108 ff.

36. See Fessard, "The Theological Structure of Marxist Atheism.", *Concilium*, *Ibid*, p. 5 ff

man. Marx's humanism exalts man to the status of creator. Man is the absolute being; his transcendence is not the attribute of his essence, it is not to be sought outside himself; it consists of history and culture. Man has the capacity to transcend himself; it happens when he develops his capacities.

If God is accepted as the creator then one has to admit the fact that man is a contingent being. To affirm God would be to alienate man, and as long as he is alienated he cannot be really man and realize himself authentically. Because God is not the creator and man not his image, there is no *a priori* essence in man. What characterizes man as such and distinguishes him from nature and animals is that he is a conscious being. Man is superior to animals according to Marx, as his brains have fully developed³⁷.

Man regains the state of God and becomes creator through liberation, from alienation from his own resources. In his *Early Writings* Marx says: "Human emancipation will be complete only when man has recognized and organized his own powers as social power so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power." Through his own labour man becomes the author of the humanized nature moulded by himself. Man is basically a labourer and it is labour that makes a man really man. Labour is the creative act, which creates not nature, but man and his history in his encounter with nature." For Marx man is his own master and owes his existence to no creator-God who would make him dependent.

From what has been stated above we get the impression that Marx aims at a thorough humanization of society. In a humanized society the realization of the essential concept of man takes place. Society becomes human when men become human, men become human when they huma-

37. On Religion, *Ibid.*, p. 50

nize nature through their labour. Man is not the work of God, but is the work of man. Man achieves through his own labour and activities, his liberation from alienation through his own resources. Then only the ideal of heaven is realized. Thus the criticism of religious ideas should cease once man is established as the supreme being. Hence humanize the economic structures, then alienation will cease, man will become really man, and truly regain his manhood projected as God. So we read: "The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest essence for man, hence with the categoric imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence." Marx wanted human emancipation to overcome the opposition between *what is* and *what ought to be*.

IV. Towards an Evaluation

Marx ranks as one of the greatest revolutionary thinkers who interpreted economic factors in historical perspectives and religious society in economic perspectives. As a genuine humanist he revolted at injustice, oppression and exploitation. Positively it infused into the toilers and oppressed a hope and revolutionary spirit and enthused them to dedicate their lives to strive after a new social order. Thus it gave a new direction to humanity. Marxism has an awareness of the underlying movement that governs our history, to control the process of the development and building up of the future. Its creative effectiveness has transformed the economic and social life of many, made the society more human and gave the working class a new impetus to work for the future.

Marxism provides us with new insights into the problem of man. Marx took for granted that he was a scientist and not a philosopher and that, by restricting the debate on man to idealism or materialism, he adopted the scientific method. He committed here a big mistake in thinking that man's world could be known entirely through scientific investigations.

There are also other weaknesses in Marxism that cannot be underestimated. The Marxists give to the conception of praxis and revolution absolute value, nay it is for them the criterion of value. This again implies an apparent contradiction with the principle of the absolute value of the person. This attitude has negative repercussions. Though Marxism hails man as the absolute, absolute, however, is not man but humanity; the individual has no reality and meaning except in relation to the totality which gives them to him, the right and dignity of man as person is here underestimated.

For Marx matter is all that counts. So the question arises: Does man arise from matter? Whence the origin of man's consciousness? With a kind of monistic materialism, and attributing eternity to matter, Marx does not give an appropriate explanation regarding the final end of history.

Another impoverishing concept of man is found in the *Early Writings* of Marx. Man is viewed as his own master, and he will be so only and insofar as he owes his own existence to himself. Again what we find in the *German Ideology* is the materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances; this forgets the fact that it is *men who change the circumstances*. Interpreting man from the standpoint of historical and social conditions is no doubt acceptable. As long as social and community relationships are founded on work and co-operation they deserve our esteem. But the weakness of Marx's thought consists in its failure to see the total view of man. On the one hand Marx exalts man to the level of God; on the other hand he is reduced to the level of labourer. For Marx god is the all-powerful state.

Marxism does not seem to be as scientific as Marx claimed it to be. It is unscientific because it is authoritarian; it is rather a dogma because it is charged of revisionalism, it is intolerant to open criticism and averse to freedom of inquiry.

Marx's basic conception of man and the universe too seem to be inadequate. He founded his ideas on materialism and this determined all his subsequent theories. According to him, his theory of productive relations based on material factors determine social relationship. The political and social organisation were only a superstructure based on that foundation. If religion, art and philosophy — according to Marxian theory of substructure and superstructure — are conditioned by economic substructure, the question is validly posed: Is not Marxist system too conditioned by those factors?

A deeper analysis of Marx's concept of man and religion, his place in the society and his final aim and end show their ambiguity. True, according to Marx, man is unique, different from material elements, plants and animals; he is a 'species being' and as such self-conscious. He is free and autonomous because he must create his own existence. But the Marxian concept of freedom is not well defined nor is the origin of the 'species being' adequately explained.

Marx's theories on religion brings him in crass contrast with the believer. A believer seeks union with the supernatural being which sustains him morally. He finds his essential identity as the image and resemblance in the supreme being. In effect it is the loss of faith in God that estranges man. Moreover the believer would assert that his faith cannot be tested empirically like any other phenomenal realities. Marx's blindness to transcendence led his humanism degenerate into a political analysis which resulted in a set of totalitarian beliefs³⁸.

Today two-thirds of the people on earth struggle for their most fundamental rights — right to eat, right to work, right to live. Could not the watchword of Marxist ethos 'struggle' be adopted by Christians against oppression, manipulation and exploitation, and struggle for a

38. Mc Mullen, *Ibid*, p. 82

new earth and humanity based on Christian principles? There persists today, both in the capitalist and developing countries, ferments of a cold revolution that can jeopardize world peace at large. Could not the myth of misunderstanding and antagonism between Christians and Communists be dispelled through dialogue and co-operation for a good cause? Or would the tension and suspicion ever remain as in the expression: "The spider said to the fly: would you come into my parlour?"

It is a point to be noted that Jesus in most of his parables (16 out of 36) condemns the wrong use of money. Money and property (possessions) dehumanize man. In fact Scripture promotes mutual economic aid and co-operation (Acts, 4:31-35; 2 Cor. 8:1-5) and shows the early Christian community who had everything in common as a model. Radhakrishnan remarks: "Communism may well be called a Christian heresy—a heresy because it is opposed to Christian orthodoxy, but not necessarily to Christian truth and Christian principles."³⁹

Christians have no right to condemn Marxian atheism for Christians themselves are often atheists in disguise. Atheists could be anybody who calls God 'Lord, Lord', but does not do the will of God; it is practice that gives credibility to faith. When we accuse the atheists of their 'this-worldly' moral zeal, they may accuse us for the 'other-worldly indifference'.

The Church has undergone changes and transformations and is open to scientific research. She works for man's personal security and dignity, safeguards the value of life and fosters moral duties. The Church has nothing to fear or to lose in entering into good relationship with the Marxists. Garaudy's thesis is worth mentioning: "If Catholics try to deepen their faith....and if Marxists try to absorb into their vision of the world the dimension of subjectivity, of transcendence' which Christianity has

39. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith*, Delhi: 1955, p. 56

brought into it, there are, I think, possibilities of convergence. In other words, if a Catholic is a better Catholic, and Marxist a better Marxist, the dialogue will be made easier."⁴⁰

In tune with the mind of the Vatican II Christians are challenged to open up new vistas for a dialogue with the Marxists and initiate a new era of international co-operation and understanding⁴¹. In accordance with the dictates of the Gospel Christians have the mission to transform and humanize the world by 'love' rather than 'revolution' and prove that Christianity is a true and authentic path to universal peace and emancipation, and not an 'opium of the people'.

40. R. Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue*, Ny: 1968, p. 19-20

41. See Vat. II., Pastoral Const. No. 21 and Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity No. 14

St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary
Bangalore

Antony Kolencherry

The Concept of God in the Theology of Liberation

The theology of Liberation is generally considered to be a Latin American phenomenon originating from the reaction man feels against economic and various other oppressions existing in society. Though it is often falsely identified with Marxism and presented as a movement that has no qualms to resort to violence, in reality it is one that draws its inspiration from the Bible and man's fundamental religiousness. Among the various themes developed in this theology the question of God is an important and relevant one. It favours a concept which depicts God as a loving Father who is revealed in human actions and events. The picture of God that emerges from liberation theology differs from the traditional one which is incompetent to deal with the problems of today's man. Together with other theological trends liberation theology is looking for a new way of God-experience.

A new Way of experiencing God

In the traditional view God is seen as a transcendent being who orders man from above to be obedient to his commands. In Christian theology this theistic view of God became established under the influence of St. Thomas's theology and his proofs for the existence of God, according to which the view of God that emerged was of an unmoved Mover who governs the world in accordance with his unalterable eternal laws. This kind of approach has been influential in forming the concept of religion and ecclesiology. The Church carries out her functions and forms herself according to the pattern derived from this concept of God. It is a hierarchical view of things;

God remains at the top, entrusting authority to worldly religious powers, who still confer power on to lower strata. This picture calls for perfect obedience from the part of the people and, in the light of this, religion easily becomes an ideology¹.

Liberation theology criticizes the role of the Church in Latin American society as ideology because she supports the ruling governments and advocates *status quo* under the pretext of avoiding social insecurity and unrest, often behind the neutrality that the Church promotes in matters of politics in the hidden support given to the prevailing system and hence to injustice and oppression. In her vision and structure the Church is unable to cope with the new demands that arise in the wake of the changed circumstances of the world. In a sense, the incompatibility of the Church comes from her God-concept that is opposed to the realization of the aspirations of man. Though traditional theology is committed to such views of God, post-Enlightenment theologians consider them inadequate. A new God-concept is evolving under the influence of secularization, giving rise to what can be called post-theistic theology, articulated along the lines of the 'Not-Object-Givenness of God'².

This calls for a new way of experiencing God. While in the past God was seen as the supreme Being who controlled the whole world, in the post-theistic theology God is experienced through man's actions. God is experienced as the active force of liberation in history, at the very moment when the human, reason-guided and responsible subject risks his life for the sake of human dignity and liberation. Post-theistic theologians thus give emphasis to human action and involvement in society.

1. See Georges De Schrijver, "Achtergronden van atheïsme", in *Streven* (Feb. 1983) 397-396

2. Theologians of political theologies like Metz, Moltmann, Solle and theologies of secularization of Rahner, Schillebeeckx and of liberation theologians can be said to be post-theistic.

The concern of the liberation theologians is the emancipation of man from various oppressions. They take note of the relevance of the Marxian analysis and other social theories in the struggle for emancipation. In the light of the stand taken in these approaches where human action is decisive in asserting man's autonomy, liberation theologians see the traditional God-concept as a hindrance. They share the view that man has come of age and that he is to become his own master. As this is according to the design of man they come to the conclusion that the traditional God-concept cannot stand and that it should be replaced by a new one in which man will experience God when he acts for human dignity and freedom.

It is mainly the approach of the social sciences which stand in the Enlightenment tradition that prompted liberation theologians to reject the traditional view in favour of a new God-concept. Under the influence of the sciences liberation theology adopts a new view of theology which is distinguished by its method. In order to appraise the theological significance of this new stand it is necessary to examine briefly the method of liberation theology.

Method of Liberation Theology

Liberation theology resorts to the traditional means of theologizing, viz., the Bible and dogmatic tradition. However, when tradition is taken into theologizing, it is done so with the consciousness that there are traces of domination in tradition. In the past, Bible was interpreted in such a way as to legitimize the role of the ruling classes. Thus theology also has been put to ideological usage. With the discovery of this fact liberation theology introduces a new way of theologizing, i. e., a new methodology for theology. Juan Luis Segundo gives a systematic presentation of this method in his book *Liberation of Theology*³.

3. Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* (Dublin: Grill and Macmillan, 1977), pp. 7-38

Segundo calls this method the "hermeneutic circle". There are four decisive steps in the circle. They are as follows: "Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. Secondly, there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. Fourthly, we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new element at our disposal."⁴

In order to explain the different stages of the hermeneutic circle Segundo introduces the examples of four authors, Harvey Cox, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and James Cone. He examines how they proceed along the hermeneutic circle, whether they succeed in completing the circle, and if they do not succeed, at what point they interrupt and what factor gives rise to the interruption. In his examination he sees that Cox interrupts at the first stage itself because of his lack of commitment. Marx stops at the second because of his lack of theological intention. Weber stops at the third stage because he is not interested in getting a new interpretation. Only Cone succeeds in completing the hermeneutic circle⁵.

The method followed by the theology of liberation is that of a completed hermeneutic circle. It has originated in the Latin American situation which is one of oppres-

4. *Ibid*, p. 9

5. Following are the works which Segundo analyses: Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Karl Marx *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988); James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1970)

sion and injustice. Basic questions, in his situation, with regard to the meaning of life, religion and theology, lead to suspicion on the societal superstructure where ideologies are employed to promote and preserve structures of oppression. In such a situation a theologian is prompted to question whether theology has also become an ideology in order to serve the interests of oppression. With a commitment to the oppressed the theologian gives a new interpretation to Scripture in order to bring out its liberative potential that can provoke radical social change. In the new reading of the Gospel, made from the perspective of the oppressed, unfolds the new concept of God who is experienced as a liberative force in history through man's actions.

Instead of starting from theoretical premises the theology of liberation develops from critical reflection on concrete realities of life. In situations of oppression it is evident that the stand of a Christian should be one of liberation. This involves socio-political struggles which are similar to the functions political parties and revolutionary movements carry out. Here arise certain questions often put to liberation theologians. What is the distinguishing mark in the involvement of a Christian in these struggles? Is not the opinion that God is experienced through these struggles reducing religion to politics?

We shall try to answer the first question by examining the spirituality that emerges from liberation struggles.

Spirituality of Liberation

Participation in the struggles to bring about socio-political and economic liberation has become inevitable in order to experience God in the Latin American situation. However, the involvement of the Church in liberation struggles will become relevant as far as the Church can inspire a spirituality through those struggles⁶. Liberation

6. Segundo Galilea, "Liberation Theology and the New Tasks facing the Church", in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed., Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 163-183, p. 177

theologians view these struggles as the way open for the poor to assert themselves as human beings and to claim their right to a dignified life. The effective way for the practice of charity, the primary Christian principle, is the liberation praxis, because as long as the situations of oppression and exploitation are not abolished works of charity do not attain their end. When one is able to practise charity, the commandment of Christ, one will have the experience of Christ. It has to be remembered that the liberation struggles do not come as a result of the application of any Christian principle, but it is ensuing from the works of the spirit. In the situation of oppression living according to the Spirit requires solidarity with the oppressed and joining the liberation struggles which, at the same time, gives a spiritual experience. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, "This struggle for justice is a quest for the Kingdom of God, ultimately a longing for the God of the Kingdom and for his justice. It is a collective adventure of liberation in which classic spiritual struggle is taking on social and historical dimension."⁷

The liberation spirituality differs from the traditional view in the sense that its emphasis is shifting from an individualistic approach to collective one. Traditional spirituality could not relate itself to the sufferings of the people and could not appreciate the involvement of the Christian in the alleviation of those sufferings. Liberation spirituality makes a correction in this attitude and tries to look at the Bible in its implications for the temporal life of man and thus to restore the historical dimension to its message.

In the place of individualistic spirituality liberation spirituality establishes solidarity with the poor and oppressed as a virtue to be cultivated by the Christian. Usually for the solution of material problems in the midst of oppression mere reliance on God would appear irrelevant.

7. Gustavo Gutierrez, "Drink from your own Well", in *Concilium* 159, 9 (1982) 38-45, p. 38

But the experience of the basic Christian communities shows that God is relevant and that through the involvement in the liberation struggles people encounter God. Liberation theologians try to show how the involvement in the struggles has a relevance for religion and how it becomes a spiritual experience. A spirituality is flowering in the midst of oppression and struggle for liberation. According to Gutierrez, "where oppression and liberation of man seem to make God irrelevant — a God filtered by our long time indifference to these problems — there must blossom faith and hope in him who comes to root out injustice and to offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation. This is a spirituality which dares to sink roots in the soil of oppression — liberation"⁸. People in the basic Christian communities have the experience of the Lord through the commitment to the cause of the poor. We meet the Lord among the exploited and believing people. He is hidden and at the same time revealed in the face of the poor.

A Christian who is inspired by the Bible to involve himself in liberative actions is distinguished by the spiritual experience he has by means of those struggles. While political agitations are often confined to themselves for a Christian they are a means through which his spirituality is fleshed out. They are an occasion to experience God. Thus it becomes clear that liberation theology is not reducing religion to politics. In order to show that this theology goes beyond politics and other secular concerns and aims at the experience of God it is necessary to examine the concept of liberation as conceived in this theology.

The Concept of Liberation

The main concern of liberation theology is the realization of liberation of man from all kinds of oppressions. The opinion that liberation is to be realized on three levels

8. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1973), p. 204

is generally accepted among liberation theologians. It is a single but complex process "which has within itself various levels of meaning which are not to be confused: economic, social, and political liberation; liberation which leads to the creation of a new man in a new society of solidarity, and liberation from sin and entrance into communion with all men"⁹.

At the first level liberation refers to man's aspiration for emancipation in the context of social, political and economic oppression. Each nation is to become independent and within the nation itself class distinction is to disappear. At this level liberation expresses the aspirations of the oppressed peoples and social classes to become independent, with emphasis on the conflictual aspect of the economic, social and political process.

It is right to call liberation, at this level, emancipation in the realm of labour, to which Marxism gave emphasis. In the Hegelian and Marxian view work is a self-formative process. However, there is relation to politics in achieving mastery over nature through work, because in alienating circumstances the work man does either through manual labour or through the implementation of technology will contribute only to his own exploitation. To put it more precisely, for those who lack political freedom, work which is expected to realize their self-formation, serves only to increase their alienation. Such a situation has to be brought to an end. Therefore one of the fundamental aspirations of man is to end his situation of slavery in the socio-economic context. Agreeing with the Marxian view liberation theologians also emphasize man's emancipation in the socio-economic fields, which can be called emancipation in the realm of labour.

Though Marxian approach is accepted with interest by theologians its critique going on among the social thinkers cannot be overlooked. Among the critiques - that

of Habermas, a critical theorist, who closely follows the neo-Marxian Frankfurt School, is of importance¹⁰. Habermas calls attention to two factors in Marx's writings: labour and interaction. Though Marx spoke of the question of interaction he did not develop it sufficiently¹¹. Habermas shows how human formation is to be continued in interaction or communication. If this is neglected new forms of domination will appear. Man may expect to attain emancipation in the realm of labour through technology. But if sufficient attention is not paid to the possibility of the extension of the use of reason to the field of human interaction, science and technology can become the instruments employed by some to dominate over others. As a result social structures arise in which man suffers oppression. Habermas has drawn attention to this fact¹². It is the same concern that liberation theologians have when they speak of liberation at the second level, i.e., aspiration of man for liberation throughout history.

Liberation at this level can be called emancipation in the realm of social structures. A proper form of society is to be formed in which man will be free from all kinds of oppression. These oppressions, which appear even when man has managed to master nature, are more visible among the developed nations. But they are visible in the underdeveloped parts of the world too. So there should be an attempt to overcome these oppressions along with the struggle for economic and political liberation.

Karl Marx and the critical theorists like Habermas stand in the tradition of Enlightenment and their main concern is emancipation. While Karl Marx gives emphasis to emancipation in the realm of labour the critical theorists show the necessity of emancipation in the realm of social

10. See for a history and theory of the Frankfurt School, David Held *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley, and Los Angeles: University of California, 1980)

11. See Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971)

12. *Ibid*, p. 53

structures also. The critical theorists try to show how a society is to be formed in which there will be no oppression in the political field and in the field of social structures. They draw out the task for social sciences for the attainment of this goal. In their view emancipation will be complete if this goal is achieved, and this is something which man is expected to attain by his own power.

But for liberation theologians the two levels or realms are not complete in themselves. They point to a third level where the process of emancipation is to be further carried out. Here comes in the role of religion which leads us to the "Biblical sources which inspire the presence and actions of man in history"¹³. They give importance to the liberative potential contained in the Bible. It is by introducing the work of Christ who brings man salvation and liberates him from the consequences of sin that they explain how the Bible has a liberative potential. "In the Bible Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Saviour liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship, and of all injustice and oppression"¹⁴. The consequences of sin, the fundamental alienation of man from God, are manifested in society. The struggle of man to overcome the various discrepancies in society will be successful only when sin is overcome. Thus, while for secular thinkers though a society free from domination can be envisaged and attained by man himself, for liberation theologians such a society will come true only if sin is overcome. Emancipation from sin is a gift of God which man experiences through his involvement in the struggle against oppression. This liberation which the Gospel promises can be called liberation in the realm of religion.

Secular thinkers concerned with emancipation concentrate their attention on the realms of labour and social

13. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., p. 37

14. *Ibid*

structures. But the experience is that man who has attained emancipation in these realms does not succeed in overcoming all kinds of domination. He finds himself confronted with the lack of peace and freedom. This experience has been pointed out as a factor which stands in the way of giving approval to liberation theology. The accusation that is brought against this theology is that it is reducing the function of religion to mere economic and political liberation. Its concern for emancipation in the realm of social structures is not given sufficient attention. Therefore often liberation theology is identified with Marxism.

But in reality liberation theology cannot be identified with Marxism because although with Marxian critiques it shares the concern for liberation in the realm of social structures, it differs from them in that it goes further to an emancipatory level of religion.

When one examines the three realms of liberation there may be a certain amount of reluctance from one's part to agree with the stand of liberation theology completely. It is possible to point out concretely, with regard to the realms of labour and social structures, where exactly the oppression is and how it is to be overcome. But with regard to the realm of religion the process is vague. It is difficult to point out where the oppression is and how to attain liberation in this realm.

In order to disperse the vagueness and to concretize liberation in the realm of religion it would be sufficient to examine the experience of the basic Christian communities where liberation theology is claimed to originate and to be further practised. Here we find a people who feel solidarity with those who suffer oppression. They struggle to attain emancipation in the realms of labour and social structures. In struggling for the attainment of emancipation of the oppressed these people have an experience which has a religious dimension. They are inspired by their religiousness to involve themselves in the struggle against oppression. In those struggles they

encounter God. What is revealed there is a particular aspect of mysticism which consists in works of charity and sacrificing oneself for the sake of one's neighbour¹⁵.

Thus liberation theology believes in emancipatory struggles that are inspired by man's fundamental religiousness. This is concretized through his struggles for emancipation in the realms of labour and social structures. Such struggles will lead to the formation of a society where there will be communion between man and man and between man and God¹⁶. The position of liberation theology is that the real emancipation which is the quest of enlightenment is attainable only through this religious dimension and that the political and social struggles are not to be rejected; because they are the means through which one's religiousness is flushed out. In one's involvement in the liberation struggles one experiences God as He who moves with man as a liberative force.

God as Liberator

The concept of a God who sits at the top of a hierarchical order issuing commands and thus demanding submission is inadequate and irrelevant for a people who lack emancipation and are subjected to oppression. They will not understand that such a God is a loving father who will liberate them from their bondage. The categories in which God is presented are incompetent to give a true picture of Him.

God can be understood only from what he has revealed of himself in historical events. However, basing on these revelations traditional theology has formed an

15. Karl Rahner also tries to bring out this aspect of mysticism. See Karl Rahner, *The Spirit in the Church* (London; Burns and Oats, 1979), pp. 29-31.

16. A critical theorist Habermas envisages a society of ideal communication. What liberation theologians have in view is also very similar to this. They speak of a society of communion. Here what distinguishes the position of liberation theologians is the religious dimension.

image of God with emphasis on the hierarchical structure. According to liberation theologians such pictures which have been formed under the spell of the ideology of the dominators are unacceptable to modern man. They believe that the God who is revealed in the Bible through historical events is a God of love. This love has been manifested in the most intense form in sending his Son. A passage from the Medellin statement is worthy of attention. "The same God is the One who in the fullness of time sends his Son, so that becoming incarnated, He will come to liberate all men from all forms of slavery to which sin has subdued them, namely, ignorance, hunger, misery and oppression, or in other words, injustice and hatred which are rooted in human egoism."¹⁷

The mission of Christ is liberation which can be brought about only through acts of love that are manifested through identification with the poor. Therefore the experience of God for today's man takes place when he identifies himself with the poor and joins their struggles for liberation. Thus among the people themselves we are to find the presence of God. This is the contribution liberation theology has to make by reflecting on the liberative praxis which is one of solidarity with the poor. It promotes a faith in the people which is different from the traditional one. God cannot be grasped today away from the midst of the society. "To believe is to love God, to be united with the poor and exploited of this world from within the very heart of the social confrontations and 'popular' struggles for liberation."¹⁸

It is by bearing witness to the love with which Christ lived that the Christian acquires spiritual experience,

17. Medellin Conference, *The Church in the Present Day Transformations of Latin America in the Light of the Council: Documents of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Medellin, Colombia, August and September, 1968* (Bogota: General Secretariate of CELAM, 1970), p. 92

18. Gutierrez and Richard Shaull, *Liberation and Change* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), p. 92.

the most intense form of which is the love of the poor. "The encounter with Christ in the poor man constitutes an authentic spiritual experience. It is a living in the Spirit, the bond of love between Father and Son, God and man, man and man."¹⁹ In God we are not experiencing a being who is transcendent and detached from us, but one who is becoming and coming with us. Belief in him is not adherence to certain fixed messages that have been drawn from his past actions. These actions point to the fact that belief in him has to be expressed in continuing these actions. In faith we are bearing witness to the Father, which is realized only when we are ready to live the love of the Father, consisting in our making brothers of one another.

An omnipotent, omniscient God standing over against a finite, limited human being is unacceptable to the modern man who is secularized and come of age. Secularization theology asks man to live as if there is no God. Yet a place is mediated for God. In the view of Bonhoeffer this God is one who disappears from the world. He is on the cross; He is weak²⁰. This theme of weakness is unacceptable to liberation theologians, on the ground that it will make the people accept their present situation and place their hopes in future when God will alleviate their sufferings. For liberation theologians God is powerful. He is liberating and giving life to the poor. He is a God of the poor²¹. He acts as a force for the poor to overthrow their situation of oppression. God is leading man to the eschatological end, but that end is reached through

19. Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology and Proclamation", in *Concilium*, 6, 10 (1974), 57-77, p. 66.

20. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Mcmillan, 1962), p. 220.

21. Gutierrez, "The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America and the Christian Communities of the Common People", in *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*, ed., Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981) 107-123, P. 123.

man's actions which pave the way for liberation. As we see God by understanding our situation we understand God as liberator through our liberative actions.

The view of God as liberative can be understood only when he is looked at from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. But this is not to be taken as having any partiality for any section of the people. It is the extermination of domination of one section over the other that is basic to this view. God is understood as liberator not to make the poor establish their domination, but to establish equality and communion. So it is in the struggle to bring about such a situation that God is experienced as liberator.

Conclusion

Karl Marx criticized philosophers for their failure to change the world. In order to effect changes in society Marx, following a negative method, unmasked the ideological approaches of the dominators and criticized the society. The process of unmasking, a negative method is accepted by critical theorists also as a means to arrive at truth. Instead of starting from principles they begin by analysing the society with its concrete realities. Liberation theology too starts from the concrete realities of life. Inspired by man's fundamental religiousness a Christian begins his life, in a society torn with oppression, by joining the poor and struggling for emancipation. In this process the ideologies of the dominant sections fall and man is emancipated and society will come to the truth. The spiritual experience a Christian draws in this process is of a God who liberates, a God who manifested himself in Christ who identified himself with the poor. With this dimension of spiritual experience to which liberation theology gives emphasis, it becomes clear that those who involve themselves in liberation struggles are on the way to realize emancipation in the realms of labour and social structures under the impulse of the liberative potential of religion,

What liberation theology has to contribute is that it tries to make clear the role of religion in the process of human emancipation. Religion cannot be indifferent to the emancipatory struggles of mankind. At the same time religion cannot be reduced to emancipatory struggles. When man acts under the impulse of religiousness, when it finds its expression through emancipatory struggles, man is on the way to attaining liberation in its completeness. There man discovers a God who moves with him, who is a loving father, a liberator.

Often the hastiness in condemning liberation theology comes from the failure to take notice of this contribution it makes. It is often presented as if it is reducing religion to emancipation from socio-economic oppression; hence it is identified with Marxism. In a world marked with injustice and oppression the true nature of God can be explained not by presenting him as omnipotent and omniscient, but in a post-theistic way, i.e., as revealing himself through human actions.

Sandesanilayam
Changanacherry

Thomas Kochuthara

The True Idea of God - some implications

"The fact remains that for some obscure reason something has gone wrong between Man and God in the way He is represented to man. Man would seem to have no clear picture of the God he longs to worship."¹ The German dramatist Goethe (1749-1832) too has indicated in *Faust* that the God as imagined by man is inadequate to His true Reality.

Though some are repeating the phrases coined by the German Philosopher Nietzsche (1844-1900): 'God is dead', there seems to be a general agreement that God and religion are essential aspects of every civilisation. At the risk of oversimplification we may approach the problem of the divine and the secular by asking a few pertinent questions. At this present stage of development does man really need God? Or, granted that man needs God, how can a transcendent (other-worldly) Being also be immanent (this-worldly)? Or, finally, is it necessary or even advisable for the Christian believer to become involved in the world and worldly pursuits since he is not made for this life but for a life to come? A clue to these questions lies in the right understanding of the idea of God.

There is now more interest in religion and less interest in religious structures. This is true especially among young people. They are looking for meaning in life, a meaning they do not seem to find in the established religious principles². There is a renewed interest

1. P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*, London: 1962, 272

2. For the term 'religious principle', see my "Sign of Contradiction", *Jeevadhara* 61 (1981), 67-75

in the relevancy of man's idea of God to life in the manifold contexts. The search for relevancy in the twentieth century world of progress and technology is still one of the major thrusts for intense interest in God and religion.

How religious are we? This, I believe, is a question which preoccupies a large number of men and women in the modern age. I am not thinking now merely of a particular theological problem but of a whole conception of religious and socio-cultural life. The concern for the kind of plans which may lead to a greater theological understanding is certainly commendable. In order to attain this understanding, we have to abandon many of the socio-religious customs, habits and institutions which are not indispensable. To say the truth very little will be gained by pretending that these customs, habits and institutions do not exist or that they have become so obsolete that they will soon disappear in their natural course while there will be a better understanding of the concept of God and religion. Much as we may like to think otherwise, it will be hard to deny that many aspects of the problem of God and religion are still darkened by the presence of maya religious principle.

It is often said that men and women of contemporary society are generally cut off from God and religion. But I feel the situation is a little more complex. It is not that there is no relation to God and religion but the attitude of the people towards God and religion has become highly ambivalent. Most people have a close relation with God. But this is often accompanied by an uneasy feeling that to recognize this fact would be to admit that one is not 'modern' or 'progressive'. This probably is the reason why many people suffer from a peculiar kind of myopia when it comes to an understanding of God and religion. They will affirm that God and religion have become obsolete and that society and men are becoming increasingly secular. It is amazing how many are convinced that the established religious principle is breaking down in spite of an almost complete absence of any firm evidence that this is indeed what is happening.

The starting point for viewing the question of God and man is to know where we are — Christians and believers living in the First World, the wealthy West, the Performance world, a minority making up about twenty percent of the world's inhabitants and enjoying eighty percent of the world's income, or living in the Third World, the maya world, the majority of mankind in utter despair. Most of the facts of our contemporary scene requires this sense of context. The facts do not come to us neat and clear. There is a context — a context of pre-suppositions and commitments.

The bulk of Christians live in the First World, post-industrial societies of the West. In this performance world the basic idea about income is to increase it and about wealth is to accumulate it. The standards of living and its claims on resources and expectations go up with higher earnings. In contrast, Christian teaching reminds one that the higher the income, the greater the responsibility towards one's 'neighbour'. "None of you can be my disciples unless he gives up all his possessions" (Lk 14:33). Short of these evangelical extremes, those who are in the First World must not satisfy their own rising superfluities at the expense of the basic needs of those who are in the maya world.

Also there is another pre-supposition of the contemporary society. Responsibilities and obligations stop at frontiers. A man of different nationality is of no concern. But the Gospel approach is different. All must be cared, even the least of the little ones. In the all-encompassing generosity of God there is neither poor nor rich, neither Gentile nor Jew.

Christianity, the most personalistic religion, has a civilizing mission. Nobody can forget that there were times when religions, especially Christianity, performed a civilizing role in history. This was one of her great accomplishments after the fall of the Roman Empire and was repeated many times after she came in contact with

new peoples of Asian, African and Latin American countries. Many modern languages have their literary beginnings connected with the translations of the Bible. In India the name of the German missionary Hermann Gundert (1814-93) who lived in Kerala and Tamil Nadu for more than twenty years could be mentioned. His pioneer work in publishing the English-Malayalam Dictionary is remarkable indeed. Also Benjamin Bailey (+1871) who had lived in India from 1816 till his death contributed much to the development of the Malayalam language and progress of secular education. In the USA, Frederic Baraga (+1868) a missionary from Slovenia, arrived in America in 1830 and worked as the first bishop of the diocese of Sault Ste. Marie-Marquette (Michigan). Besides his usual missionary activities, he composed and printed the Grammar (1850) and the dictionary (1853) of the Ojibway language, which have not been surpassed. His work contributed substantially to the literature of the American Indian tribes. Thus Pope Paul VI mentions in his encyclical on the *Development of Peoples* (1967) the contribution of missionaries: "The Church has never failed to foster the human progress of the nations to which she brings faith in Christ. Her missionaries have built not only churches but also hostels and hospitals, schools and universities. Teaching the local populations the means of deriving the best advantages from their natural resources, missionaries have often protected them from the greed of foreigners. Without doubt their work, inasmuch as it was human, was not perfect, and sometimes the announcement of the authentic Gospel message was infiltrated by many ways of thinking and acting which were characteristic of their home country. But the missionaries were also able to develop and foster local institutions. In many a region they were among the pioneers in material progress as well as in cultural advancement. Let it suffice to recall the example of Father Charles de Foucauld, whose charity earned him the title 'Universal Brother' and who edited an invaluable dictionary of the Touareg language. We ought to pay tribute to these pioneers who have been too often forgotten, but were urged on by the love of Christ, just as we

honour their imitators and successors who today still continue to put themselves at the generous and unselfish service of those to whom they announce the Gospel" (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 12).

Today, the situation is different. Most cultural groups have developed their literature. Also there are many secular sources of help such as the introduction of the improved agro-industrial methods. This does not mean that christianity and various religious forces are nowhere involved in civilizing activities. The decisive point to be noticed is that since the Church and various religious forces are no more the only or the main actors, there can be a clear vision of reality, including the reality of God. As a general observation, it may be said that contemporary cultures have achieved their maturity. They have come of age.

By affirming that the Church has a civilizing mission, we do not intend to say that the Church has a political mission in the narrower sense: "Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 42: it is explained in more detail in the *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9). The understanding of this distinction is most important for an understanding of the role the Church plays in the development of mankind. In the new Testament we see that Christ has nothing to say about any particular form of politics, any special economic theory or any social or cultural programme. His saying about giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar's was no endorsement of the imperial form of government. (If this recognition was particularized by a reference to Caesar, it was only because Caesar represented the political reality of Christ's time.) The same can be said about the economic and social spheres. No particular socio-economic situation was sanctioned by Christ. When St Paul says that women should keep their heads veiled (cf. I Corinthians 11:2-15), he makes no judgement on the social custom itself. He merely advises his Christians to beware of giving scandal.

Therefore, the Church's mission is not properly political, social or economic. It is, rather, a religious one. Unfortunately the term 'religious' is too frequently misunderstood. Through the influence of the medieval Latin pietistic theology, it is taken to mean an other-worldly, celestial concern. When it comes to the ideas of the sacred and the profane, we all tend to be a bit confused. Even when we know in our minds that all creation is sacred, in our hearts and emotions we do not always feel that way about it. For example, we still tend to have the same feeling when we consider the celibacy and virginity of the consecrated people vis-à-vis the sexuality of married men and women. We consider incense to be 'holy' but other perfumes 'profane'! and guitar to be 'holy' but veena 'profane'! Gradually, an authentic religious principle should be able to free the individuals from false distinctions which are historically conditioned.

'Religious' in this context means the irruption of the divine into the human, the reality of God and His saving presence into the finite order. In this sense, 'religious' dimension does not mean a *fuga mundi*, an escape, a flight from this world. Religion embraces the secular order. For that reason the particular social, political and economic realities are of vital interest to the Church and her mission. It is into these realities, as they exist here and now in the Third World, that she must bring in the divine.

If the 'religious' and the 'divine' embrace the secular, there is no possibility for abandoning secular activity altogether and seek only the 'heavenly' city. There is also no chance to act in the secular area as though it had no relevance at all to the world of religion. The secular is not taken here in the sense of the forces of evil. The secular is understood as of created reality which has, in God's design, its own autonomy and seeks, with man as the leader, its own perfection. There is a rightful independence of earthly affairs. 'If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be

gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36).

Basically autonomy means independence. Any particular subject has an inherent set of laws by which it is governed and which, given the proper conditions, frees itself from any unnecessary dependence on something else for its operation. (Aristotelian view in this regard stresses the idea against the other worldly Platonic preoccupation.) Thus we have the autonomy of science. Every human science, be it physics or astronomy, has its own laws by which it operates and which, faithfully and strictly followed, will produce definite values³.

All human activity is sacred. "Throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, such human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him who is to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth" (*Ibid.*, no. 34). If man is good, and what he does as man, is also good, it is in accord with the divine will. There was, and is, a false dichotomy between the divine and the profane. In this false dichotomy secular activity such as working in a factory or manning a space-craft is considered neutral. In this case, a worker or a cosmonaut may not be doing anything sinful, but they are not seen as

3. The case of Galileo is one of the hostile attitudes manifested by the Church in the past. Recently, Pope John Paul II has revised the issue. Galileo had simply practised the autonomy of the laws of his science. It could not be, then, that the results of his science be contrary to the faith

contributing directly to the coming of God's kingdom!! It is only when they come to Church on Sunday or say the Rosary that they fulfil God's will!! This is the unspoken conviction of many Christians. They feel they are most truly Christian only when at prayer. In the world they feel they are living religiously 'neutral' lives.

Now it is clear from Church's teachings that all human activity is sacred. It "concerns even the most ordinary everyday activities. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brethren, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan. Thus, far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's greatness and the flowering of His own mysterious design. For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. Hence it is clear that men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows. They are, rather, more stringently bound to do these very things" (*Ibid*). The basic reason for this is found in *Genesis* 1:26-27 where man is given control of the world⁴. It is a mandate from God. When man fulfils it, he is doing God's will, building up God's kingdom.

Even the most ordinary every day activities are included in this mandate. The maya men are ignorant of the value of this mandate. Thus washing dishes, building a hut, paying taxes, cutting grass, teaching, keeping one's street clean, enjoying a fun are all sacred activities because

4. See my *Man and Social Problems*, Kottayam: 1984, 28

they are willed by God. Everything is ordered to the perfection of man and ultimately of human society. What is the norm of all this activity? How do we measure its value? Man and human society are the norm. Human activity "should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it" (*Ibid.* no. 35). It should be noted that this is the basis of a true Christian humanism and that there is no mention of religion or prayer, even of God, in the text quoted above. In other words, whatever is good for man and society is precisely God's will. All kinds of supernaturalism and triumphalism are out of question in an authentic religious principle.

Authentic religious principle should be involved where there are human values at stake. If the First World is trying to decide whether to increase their national income, that is not a religious issue. But if this has economic and political repercussions on the lives of millions of people in the Third World, obviously it is a religious, moral issue.

Pope John XXIII included in his encyclical *Peace on Earth* the enumeration of human rights which are "universal and inviolable and therefore inalienable" (no. 2). This intention of the Church has been confirmed by Vatican II: "Therefore, by virtue of the Gospel committed to her, the Church proclaims the rights of man" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 41).

Gaudium et Spes includes also a statement which may scare some but which may be a ray of hope that all is not lost yet in the established religious principle: The Church "acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered" (*Ibid.*). But the Church as an established religious principle is always in danger of identifying herself with an established reality principle and of supporting it by condemning all its critics regardless how far this social order may be different from her own social teachings.

Today there are plenty of accusations of leftist leanings by good Christians of those who do just what Vatican II claims to be the official line of the modern Church. There are Christians (priests, nuns and laymen) taking an active part in the struggle against hunger and poverty, against sexual and racial discriminations, against war and sickness not only in forms which are approved by the establishment but also in forms which the established religious principle considers untouchable or dangerous. If the established religious principle keeps silent it will be thrown out with the exploiters. If it tries to protect its votaries insofar as they help to control the unorganized masses but neglects to advocate God-given human rights to every person regardless of their power and wealth, the emergence of an authentic religious principle will be delayed.

To be part of a just revolution because the present reality principle makes human life impossible for millions of people, especially in the Third World, will give the established religious principle the opportunity to give a right direction and will minimize the use of force. Believers must be active fighters for human rights.

In the changed conditions of today, religions have a different role to play. Some may notice a marked decline in the belief in God and religion and this perhaps may tend to become even more pronounced in the coming years. The authentic religious principle which may take shape in the future must therefore attract people not only as source of religious piety but also as centres of socio-cultural renaissance. It should give the lead in the rehabilitation of the human society, and in preserving and strengthening the rich heritage of the nation.

In the wake of the critical power and the emergence of authentic religious principle, the conservative ritualistic and maya religious principle should look upon the new trends, not as a threat to its survival, but as an opportunity for its reformation with a view to serving the humanity

better. Besides being men of character and scholarship, its members should adopt a truly progressive attitude to their responsibilities. By practising and exposing the authentic religious principle, they should strive to rid mankind of its many religious and socio-cultural infirmities. Only thus can they justify their continued and salvific presence in this world.

Faith cannot be easily reduced to an articulated set of principles. Man's relationship to God is a mystery. The modern world is a pluralistic society. The Gospel similes such as 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' suggest the future of the established religious principle. Authentic religious principle can be realized only in a situation of Diaspora. Perhaps in the future a scattered few may witness to the light of the world. The Church has a religious mission out of which come "a function, a light, and an energy which can serve the structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 42). Thus the established religious principle has a civilizing mission—to bring every culture into its essential relation, the divine, thereby manifesting the true idea of God and of the authentic religious principle.

Paurastya Vidyapitham,
Kottayam - 686 010

Thomas Vellilamthadam

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